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ENGLAND
ABOUT A.D. 1000
and at
THE PRESENT TIME
SCALE OF MILES
MODERN NAMES & BOUNDARIES BLACK
ANCIENT ..... OF ..... WHITE
IRISH SEA
ENGLISH CHANNEL
PERTH
ARGYLL
STIRLING
FIFE
LANARK
AYR
PEEBLES
SELKIRK
BERWICK
ROXBURGH
DUMFRIES
NORTHUMBERLAND
WIGTON
DURHAM
WESTMORL.
YORK
LANCASTER
LIVERPOOL
FLINT
CHESTER
DERBY
NOTTS
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MERIONETH
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HEREFORD
WORCESTER
WARWICK
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CARMARTHEN
PEMBROKE
GLAMORCA
MONMTH
GLOUCESTER
OXFORD
HERTS
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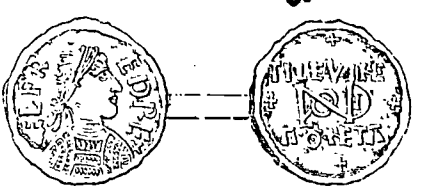
ALFRED THE GREAT

BY

THOMAS HUGHES,

Author of "Tom Brown's School Days."

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

PREFACE 1

CHAPTER I.

OF KINGS AND KINGSHIP 7

CHAPTER II.

A THOUSAND YEARS AGO 15

CHAPTER III.

CHILDHOOD 32

CHAPTER IV.

CNIHTHOOD 44

CHAPTER V.

THE DANE 56

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST WAVE 68

CHAPTER VII.

ALFRED ON THE THRONE 80

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

THE SECOND WAVE 91

CHAPTER IX.

ATHELNEY 100

CHAPTER X.

ETHANDUNE 114

CHAPTER XI.

RETROSPECT 127

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING'S BOARD OF WORKS 136

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING'S WAR OFFICE AND ADMIRALTY 147

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KING'S LAWS 159

CHAPTER XV.

THE KING'S JUSTICE 173

CHAPTER XVI.

THE KING'S EXCHEQUER 189

CHAPTER XVII.

THE KING'S CHURCH 200

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KING'S FRIENDS 212

CHAPTER XIX.

PAGE

THE KING'S NEIGHBOURS 228

CHAPTER XX.

THE KING'S FOE 240

CHAPTER XXI.

THE THIRD WAVE 250

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KING'S HOME 267

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE KING AS AUTHOR 278

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KING'S DEATH AND WILL 301

CHAPTER XXV.

THE KING'S SUCCESSORS 311

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF THE WHOLE MATTER. 317

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

MAP OF ENGLAND ABOUT A.D. 1000 AND AT THE PRESENT TIME . . . . . *frontispiece* 1

KING ALFRED AT THE BATTLE OF ASHDOWN . . . *to face* 76

SEDULOUSLY BENT ON ACQUIRING LEARNING . . . „ 177

PREFACE.

THE early ages of our country's history have been studied, and written and re-written, with a care and ability which have left nothing to desire. Every source from which light could be drawn has been explored by eminent scholars, and probably all the facts which will ever be known have been now ascertained. Kemble, Palgrave, and Thorpe have been succeeded by Pearson and Freeman, whose great ability and industry every student of those times, however humble, must be able to recognise, and to whom the present writer is anxious to express his deep obligations. Thanks to their labours, whoever takes for his subject any portion of our early national history will find his task one of comparative ease.

And of all that early history the life and times of Alfred are, beyond all question, the most absorbing in interest. The story has been written many times, from different points of view, by natives and foreigners; from Sir John Spelman, the first edition of whose Life of Alfred was published in 1709, to Dr. Pauli, whose

most admirable and exhaustive work is not yet eighteen years old. That book was written "by a German for Germans," as we learn from the preface. Its plan, Dr. Pauli tells us, was conceived at Oxford, in November 1848, "at a time when German hearts trembled, as they had seldom done before, for the preservation of their Fatherland, and especially for the continuance of those states which were destined by Heaven for the protection and support of Germany.".

Happily no German need now tremble for the preservation of his Fatherland, but the problems which 1848 started still await an answer. The revolutionary spur which was then given to the intellectual and political activity of Christendom has as yet done little beyond dooming certain conditions of political and social life, and awakening a very genuine and widespread longing for some better and higher life for nations than has ever yet been realized.

The political earthquake of 1848, then, led Dr. Pauli to take so deep an interest in the struggles and life-work of King Alfred, that he could not rest until he had placed a picture of them before his German fellow-countrymen, for their study, warning, and encouragement. The German student felt that somehow this story would prove of value to those in his Fatherland who were struggling for some solid ground upon which to plant their feet, in the midst of the throes of the last great European crisis. A like conviction has led me to attempt the same work, an

Englishman for Englishmen, in a crisis which seems likely to prove at least as serious as that of 1848.

For the events of the last few years—one may perhaps say more particularly of the last few months —have forced on those who think on such subjects at all, the practical need of examining once more the principles upon which society, and the life of nations, rest. How are nations to be saved from the tyranny or domination of arbitrary will, whether of a Cæsar or a mob? is the problem before us, and one which is becoming daily more threatening, demanding an answer at the peril of national life. France for the moment is the country where the question presses most urgently. There the most democratic of European peoples seemed to have given up her ideal commonwealth in despair, and Imperialism or Cæsarism had come out most nakedly, in this generation, under our own eyes. The Emperor of the French has shown Christendom, both in practice by his government, and theoretically in his writings, what this Imperialism is, upon what it stands. The answer, maturing now these seventeen years, has come in a shout from a whole people, thoroughly roused at last, "Away with it! It is undermining society, it is destroying morality. Brave, simple, honest life is becoming, if it has not already become, impossible under its shadow. Away with this, at once, and for ever, let what will come in its place!"

But when we anxiously look for what *is* to come

in its place in France, we are baffled and depressed. We seem to be gazing only into the hurly-burly of driving cloud and heaving sea, in which as yet no trace of firm land is visible. The cry for "ministerial responsibility," or "government by the majority," seems for the moment to express the best mind of the nation. Alas! has not Louis Napoleon shown us how little worth lies in such remedies? Responsibility to whom?—To no person at all, I presume the answer would be, but to the majority of the nation, who are the source of all power, whose will is to be done whatever it may be. But the Emperor of the French would acknowledge such responsibility, would maintain that his own government is founded on it, that he is the very incarnation of "government by the majority;" and one cannot but own that he has at least proved how easily such phrases may be turned to the benefit of his own Imperialism.

The problem has been showing itself, though not in so urgent a form, in England, in the late discussions as to the House of Lords. That part of our machinery for government has been so nearly in conflict with the national will as to rouse a host of questions. What principle worth preserving does this House of Lords represent? Is it compatible with government by the majority? Does not its existence involve a constant protest against the idea that the people are the source of all power? Is

such a protest endurable, if the machinery for governing, in so complicated a state of society as ours, is to work smoothly?

Here, again, one has heard little beyond angry declamation; but the discussion has shown that the time is come when we English can no longer stand by as interested spectators only, but in which every one of our own institutions will be sifted with rigour, and will have to show cause for its existence. In every other nation of Christendom the same restlessness exists, the same ferment is going on; and under many different forms, and by many different roads, the same end is sought—the deliverance from the dominion of arbitrary will, the establishment of some order in which "righteousness shall be the girdle of the loins, and truth the girdle of the reins," of whoever wields the sovereign power amongst the nations of the earth.

As a help in this search, this life of the typical English King is here offered, not to historical students, but to ordinary English readers. The writer has not attempted, and is not competent to take part in, the discussion of any of the deeply interesting critical, antiquarian, and philological questions which cross the path of every student of Anglo-Saxon history, and which have been so ably handled by the authors already referred to, and many others. As a politician, both in and out of the House of Commons, he has had to examine for himself for many years

the actual ground upon which the political life of the English nation stands, that he might solve for his own individual guidance, according to the best light he could get, the most practical of all questions for a public man,—what leader he should support? what reforms he should do his best to obtain? Born in Alfred's own county, and having been from childhood familiar with the spots which history and tradition associate with some of the most critical events of the great King's life, he has reached the same conclusion as Dr. Pauli by a different process. He has learnt to look upon the Saxon King as the true representative of the nation in contrast to the great Cæsar, so nearly his contemporary, whose aim was to weld together all nations and tribes in one lifeless empire under his own sceptre. That empire of Charlemagne has been exalted of late as the beginning of all true order for Europe and America. If this were so, it would be indeed a waste of time to dwell on the life and work of Alfred. If, however, precisely the contrary be true, it must be worth while to follow as faithfully as we can the simple honest life of the great Saxon King, endeavouring to ascertain upon what ground that life and work of the ninth century stood, and whether the same ground abides in the nineteenth for all nations, alike for those who have visible kings and those who are without them.

THE LIFE

OF

ALFRED THE GREAT.

CHAPTER I.

OF KINGS AND KINGSHIP.

"WE come now to the last form of heroism, that which we call 'Kingship,'—The Commander over men; he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated, and loyally surrender themselves and find their welfare in doing so, may be reckoned the most important of great men." "In all sections of English life the God-made king is needed, is pressingly demanded in most, in some cannot longer without peril as of conflagration be dispensed with." So spoke, twenty years ago, the teacher, prophet, seer—call him what you will—who has in many ways moved more deeply than any other the hearts of this generation. Has not the conscience of England responded to the words? Have not most of us felt that in some shape—not perhaps in that which he preaches—what

Mr. Carlyle calls "kingship" is, in fact, our great need; that without it our modern life, however full for the well-to-do amongst us of all that can interest, stimulate, gratify our intellects, passions, appetites, is a poor and mean thing, ever getting poorer and meaner. Yes, this cry, to which Mr. Carlyle first gave voice in our day, has been going up from all sections of English society these many years, in sad, fierce, or plaintive accents. The poet most profoundly in sympathy with his time calls for

> "A strong still man in a blatant land,
> Whatever you name him what care I,
> Aristocrat, autocrat, democrat, one
> Who can rule and dare not lie."

The newest school of philosophy preaches an "organized religion," an hierarchy of the best and ablest. In an inarticulate way the confession rises from the masses of our people, that they too feel on every side of them the need of wise and strong government—of a will to which their will may loyally submit—before all other needs; have been groping blindly after it this long while; begin to know that their daily life is in daily peril for want of it, in this country of limited land, air, and water, and practically unlimited wealth.

But Democracy,—how about Democracy? We had thought a cry for it, and not for kings, God-made or of any other kind, was the characteristic of our time. Certainly kings such as we have seen them have not gained or deserved much reverence of late years, are not likely to be called for with any great earnest-

ness, by those who feel most need of guidance, and deliverance, in the midst of the bewildering conditions and surroundings of our time and our life.

Twenty years ago the framework of society went all to pieces over the greater part of Christendom, and the kings just ran away or abdicated, and the people, left pretty much to themselves, in some places made blind work of it. Solvent and well-regulated society caught a glimpse of that same "big black democracy,"—the monster, the Frankenstein, as they hold him, at any rate the great undeniable fact of our time,—a glimpse of him moving his huge limbs about, uneasily and blindly. Then, mainly by the help of broken pledges and bayonets, the so-called kings managed to get the gyves put on him again, and to shut him down in his underground prison. That was the sum of their work in the last great European crisis; not a thankworthy one from the people's point of view. However, society was supposed to be saved, and the "party of order" so called breathed freely. No; for the 1848 kind of king there is surely no audible demand anywhere.

Here in England in that year we had our 10th of April, and muster of half a million special constables of the comfortable classes, with much jubilation over such muster, and mutual congratulations that we were not as other men, or even as these Frenchmen, Germans, and the like. Taken for what it was worth, let us admit that the jubilations did not lack some sort of justification. The 10th of April muster may be perhaps accepted as a sign that the reverence

for the constable's staff has not quite died out yet amongst us. But let no one think that for this reason Democracy is one whit less inevitable in England than on the Continent; or that its sure and steady advance, and the longing for its coming, which all thoughtful men recognise, however little they may sympathise with them, is the least incompatible with the equally manifest longing for what our people intend by this much-worshipped and much-hated name.'

For what does Democracy mean to us English in these years? Simply an equal chance for all; a fair field for the best men, let them start from where they will, to get to the front; a clearance out of sham governors, and of unjust privilege, in every department of human affairs. It cannot be too often repeated, that they who suppose the bulk of our people want less government, or fear the man who "can rule and dare not lie," know little of them. Ask any representative of a popular constituency, or other man with the means of judging, what the people are ready for in this direction. He will tell you that, in spite perhaps of all he can say or do, they *will* go for compulsory education, the organization of labour (including therein the sharp extinction of able-bodied pauperism), the utilization of public lands, and other reforms of an equally decided character. That for these purposes they desire more government, not less; will support with enthusiasm measures, the very thought of which takes away the breath and loosens the knees of ordinary politicians; will rally with loyalty and trustfulness to

men who will undertake these things with courage and singleness of purpose.

But admit all this to be so, yet why talk of kings and kingship? Why try to fix our attention on the last kind of persons who are likely to help? Kings have become a caste, sacred or not, as you may happen to hold, but at any rate a markedly separate caste. Is not this a darkening of counsel, a using of terms which do not really express your meaning? Democrats we know: Tribunes of the people we know. When these are true and single-minded, they are the men for the work you are talking of. To do it in any thorough way, in any way which will last, you must have men in real sympathy with the masses.

True. But what if the special function of the king is precisely this of sympathy with the masses? Our biblical training surely would seem to teach that it is. When all people are to bow before the king, all nations to do him service, it is *because* "he shall deliver the poor when he crieth, the needy also, and him that hath no helper." When the king prays for the judgments and righteousness of God, it is in order that "he may judge Thy people according unto right, and defend the poor." When the king sits in judgment, the reason of his sentence, whether of approval or condemnation, turns upon this same point of sympathy with the poor and weak,—"Inasmuch as ye have done it, or not done it, to the least of these my brethren." From one end to the other of the Bible we are face to face with these words, "king" and "kingdom;" from the first word to the last the same

idea of the king's work, the king's functions, runs through history, poem, parable, statute, and binds them together. The king fills at least as large a space in our sacred books as in Mr. Carlyle's; the writers seem to think him, and his work, quite as necessary to the world as Mr. Carlyle does.

To those who look on the Hebrew scriptures as mere ancient Asian records, which have been luckily preserved, and are perhaps as valuable as the Talmud or the Vedas, this peculiarity in them will seem of little moment. To those who believe otherwise—who hold that these same scriptures contain the revelation of God to the family of mankind so far as words can reveal Him—the fact is one which deserves and must claim their most serious thought. If they desire to be honest with themselves, they will not play fast and loose with the words, or the ideas; will rather face them, and grudge no effort to get at what real meaning or force lies for themselves in that which the Bible says as to kings and kingdoms, if indeed any be left for us in A.D. 1869. As a help in the study we may take this again from the author already quoted:—"The only title wherein I with confidence trace eternity, is that of king. He carries with him an authority from God, or man will never give it him. Can I choose my own king? I can choose my own King Popinjay and play what farce or tragedy I may with him: but he who is to be my ruler, whose will is to be higher than my will, was chosen for me in heaven. Neither except in such obedience to the heaven-chosen is freedom so

much as conceivable." Words of very startling import these, no doubt; but the longer we who accept the Hebrew scriptures as books of the revelation of God think on them, the more we shall find them sober and truthful words. At least that is the belief of the present writer, which belief he hopes to make clearer in the course of this work to those who care to go along with him.

And now for the word "king," for it is well that we should try to understand it before we approach the life of the noblest Englishman who ever bore it. "Cyning, by contraction king," says Mr. Freeman, "is evidently closely connected with the word Cyn, or Kin. The connexion is not without an important meaning. The king is the representative of the race, the embodiment of its national being, the child of his people and not their father." Another eminent scholar, Sir F. Palgrave, derives king from "Cen," a Celtic word signifying the head. "The commander of men," says Mr. Carlyle, "is called Rex, Regulator, Roi: our own name is still better —King, Könning, which means Can-ning, able man." And so the ablest scholars are at issue over the word, which would seem to be too big to be tied down to either definition. Surely, whatever the true etymology may be, the ideas — "representative," "head," "ablest"—do not clash, but would rather seem necessary to one another to bring out the full meaning of the word. "The representative of the race, the embodiment of its national being," must be its "head," should be its "ablest, its best man." At any rate

they were gathered up in him whose life we must now try to follow: "England's herdman," "England's darling," "England's comfort," as he is styled by the old chroniclers. A thousand years have passed since Alfred was struggling with the mighty work appointed for him by God in this island. What that work was, how it was done, what portion of it remains to this day, it will be our task and our privilege to consider.

CHAPTER II.

A THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

"For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, seeing it is past as a watch in the night."

THE England upon which the child Alfred first looked out must, however, detain us for a short time. And at the threshold we are met with the fact that the names of his birthplace, Wanating (Wantage); of the shire in which it lies, Berroc-shire (Berkshire); of the district stretching along the chalk hills above it, Ashdown; of the neighbouring villages, such as Uffington, Ashbury, Kingston-Lisle, Compton, &c., remain unchanged. The England of a thousand years ago was divided throughout into shires, hundreds, tithings, as it remains to this day. Almost as much might until lately have been said of the language. At least the writer, when a boy, has heard an able Anglo-Saxon scholar of that day maintain, that if one of the churls who fought at Ashdown with Alfred could have risen up from his breezy grave under a barrow, and walked down the hill into Uffington, he would have been understood without difficulty by the peasantry. That generation

has passed away, and with them much of the racy vernacular which so charmed the Anglo-Saxon antiquary thirty years ago. But let us hear one of the most eminent of contemporary English historians on the general question. "The main divisions of the country," writes Mr. Freeman, "the local names of the vast mass of its towns and villages, were fixed when the Norman came, and have survived with but little change to our own day. . . . He found the English nation occupying substantially the same territory, and already exhibiting in its laws, its language, its national character, the most essential of the features which it still retains. Into the English nation, which he thus found already formed, his own dynasty and his own followers were gradually absorbed. The conquered did not become Normans, but the conquerors did become Englishmen." Grand, tough, much-enduring old English stock, with all thy imperviousness to ideas, thy Philistinism, afflicting to the children of light in these latter days, thy obdurate, nay pig-headed, reverence for old forms out of which the life has flown, adherence to old ways which have become little better than sloughs of despond, what man is there that can claim to be child of thine whose pulse does not quicken, and heart leap up, at the thought? Who has not at the very bottom of his soul faith in thy future, in thy power to stand fast in this time of revolutions, which is upon and before thee and all nations, as thou hast stood through many a dark day of the Lord in the last thousand years?

But though the divisions of the country, and the

names, remain the same, or nearly so, we must not forget the great superficial change which has taken place by the clearance of the forest tracts. These spread, a thousand years ago, over very large districts in all parts of England. In these forests the droves of swine, which formed a considerable portion of the wealth, and whose flesh furnished the staple food, of the people, wandered, feeding on acorns and beech-mast. Here, too, the outlaws, who abounded in those unsettled times, found shelter and safety; and they were used alike by Saxon and Dane for ambush and stronghold. Christian monks, escaping from the sack of their abbeys and cathedrals, and carrying hardly-saved relics, fled to them, and often lived in them for years; and heathen bands, beaten and hard pressed by Alfred or his aldermen, could often foil their pursuers, and lie hidden in their shade, until the Saxon soldiery had gone home to their harvest, or their sowing. The sudden blows which the Danes seem always to have been able to strike in the beginning of their campaigns were made possible by these great tracts of forest, through which they could steal without notice.

There were a few great trunk roads, such as Watling Street, which ran from London to Chester, and the Ickenild Way, through Berks, Wilts, and Somersetshire, and highways or tracks connecting villages and towns. These seem to have been numerous and populous; and in them and the monasteries, before Alfred's time, trades had begun to flourish. We even find that there must have been skilful jewellers and weavers in Wessex; witness the vessels in gold and

silver-gilt, and silk dresses and hangings, which his father and he carried to Rome as presents to the Pope, and Alfred's jewel, found in 1693 in Newton Park, near Athelney, and now in the Ashmolean Museum. The lands immediately adjoining towns, monasteries, and the houses of aldermen and thegns were well cultivated, and produced cereals in abundance, and orchards and vineyards seem to have been much cared for. The state of the country, however, is best summed up by Kemble:—"On the natural clearings of the forest, or on spots prepared by man for his own uses; in valleys bounded by gentle acclivities which poured down fertilizing streams; or on plains which here and there rose clothed with verdure above surrounding marshes; slowly, and step by step, the warlike colonists adopted the habits and developed the character of peaceful agriculturists. The towns which had been spared in the first rush of war gradually became deserted and slowly crumbled to the soil, beneath which their ruins are yet found from time to time, or upon which shapeless masses yet remain to mark the sites of a civilization whose bases were not laid deep enough. All over England there soon existed a network of communities, the principle of whose being was separation as regarded each other, the most intimate union as respected the individual members of each. Agricultural not commercial, dispersed not centralized, content within their own limits, and little given to wandering, they relinquished in a great degree the habits and feelings which had united them as military adventurers, and

the spirit which had achieved the conquest of an empire was now satisfied with the care of maintaining inviolate a little peaceful plot, sufficient for the cultivation of a few simple households."

Bishop Wilfrid, a century before, had instructed the South Saxons in improved methods of fishing, and they were energetic hunters, so that their tables were well provided with lighter delicacies, though as a people they preferred heavy and strong meats and drinks. Their meals were frequent, at which the boiled and baked meats were handed round to the guests on spits, each helping himself as he had a mind. The heavy feeding was followed by heavy carousings of mead and ale; and, for rich people, wine, and "pigment," a drink made of wine, honey, and spices, and "morat," a drink of mulberry-juice and honey. Harpers and minstrels played and sang while the drinking went on, providing such intellectual food as our fathers cared to take, and jugglers and jesters were ready, with their tumblings of one kind or another, when the guests wearied of the performances of the higher artists.

Song-craft was at this time less cultivated in England, except by professors, than it had been a hundred years before. Then every guest was expected to take his turn, and it would seem to have been somewhat of a disgrace for a man not to be able to sing, or recite some old Teutonic ballad to music. Thus we find in the celebrated story of Cædmon, told in Bede's "Ecclesiastical History," that though he had come to full age he had never learnt any poetry, "and

therefore at entertainments, when it had been deemed for the sake of mirth that all in turn should sing to the harp, he would rise for shame from the table when the harp approached him, and go out." The rest of the story is so characteristic of the times that we may well allow Bede to finish it in this place. "One time when he had done this, and left the house of the entertainment, he went to a neat stall of which he had charge for the night, and there set his limbs to rest, and fell asleep. Then a man stood by him in a dream and hailed him by name, and said, 'Cædmon, sing me something.' Then answered he, 'I cannot sing anything, and therefore I went out from the entertainment and came hither for that I could not sing.' But the man said, 'However, thou canst sing to me.' Cædmon asked then, 'What shall I sing?' and the man answered, 'Sing me Creation.' When he had received this answer, then began he at once to sing in praise of God the Creator verses and words which he had never heard. This was the beginning:—

" 'Now let us praise
The keeper of heaven's kingdom,
The Creator's might,
And the thought of His mind,
The works of the World-Father—
How of all wonders
He was the beginning.
The holy Creator
First shaped heaven
A roof for earth's children;
Then the Creator,
The keeper of mankind,

The Eternal Lord,
The Almighty Father,
Afterwards made the earth
A fold for men.'

Then arose he from sleep, and all that he sleeping had sung he held fast in his memory, and soon added to them many words as of a song worthy of God. Then came he on the morrow to the town-reeve who was his alderman, and told him of the gift he had gotten, and the town-reeve took him to the abbess (St. Hilda), and told her. Then she ordered to gather all the wise men, and bade him in their presence tell his dream and sing the song, that by the doom of them all it might be proved what it was, and whence it came. Then it seemed to all, as indeed it was, that a heavenly gift had been given him by the Lord himself. Then they related to him a holy speech, and bade him try to turn that into sweet song. And when he had received it he went home to his house, and coming again on the morrow sang them what they had related to him in the sweetest voice." So Cædmon was taken by Abbess Hilda into one of her monasteries, and there sang "the outgoing of Israel's folk from the land of the Egyptians, and the ingoing of the Land of Promise, and of Christ's incarnation and sufferings and ascension, and many other spells of Holy Writ. But he never could compose anything of leasing or of idle song, but those only which belonged to religion, and became a pious tongue to sing."

The cowherd getting his inspiration, and carrying

it at once to his town-reeve; the reference to the saintly abbess; the conference of the wise men of the neighbourhood to pass their doom on the occurrence; and the consequent retirement of Cædmon from the world, and devotion to the cultivation of his gift under the shadow of the Church, form a picture of one corner of England, a thousand years ago, which may help us to understand the conditions of life amongst our ancestors in several respects. For one thing it brings us directly into contact with the Church—in this ninth century the most obvious and important fact in England, as in every other country of Christendom. Churches have been divided into those that audibly preach and prophesy; those that are struggling to preach and prophesy, but cannot yet; and those that are gone dumb with old age, and only mumble delirium prior to dissolution. This would look like an exhaustive division at first sight, but yet the English Church, at the time of Alfred's birth, would scarcely fall under either category.

Up to the beginning of the ninth century the history of the Church in England had been one of extraordinary activity and earnestness. She had not only completed her work of conversion within the island, and established centres from which the highest education and civilization then attainable flowed out on all the Teutonic kingdoms, from the English Channel to the Frith of Forth, but had also sent forth a number of such missionaries as St. Boniface, such scholars as Alcuin, to help in the establishment of their Master's kingdom on the Continent.

The sort of work which she was still doing in England, in the eighth century, may be gathered from the authentic accounts of the lives of such men as St. Cuthbert, who is said to have been Alfred's patron saint, which may easily be separated from the miraculous legends with which they are loaded. St. Cuthbert from his boyhood had devoted himself to monastic life, and had risen to be rector of his monastery, when some great epidemic passed over the northern counties.

"Many then, in that time of great pestilence, profaned their profession by unrighteous doings, and—neglecting the mysteries of the holy faith in which they had been instructed—hastened and crowded to the erring cures of idolatry, as if they could ward off the chastisement sent by God their maker by magic or charms, or any secret of devil-craft. To correct both these errors, the man of God often went out of his monastery, and sometimes on a horse, at other times on his feet, came to the places lying round, and preached and taught to the erring the way of steadfastness in the truth. It was at that time the custom with folk of the English kin that when a mass priest came into a town they should all come together to hear God's word, and would gladly hear the things taught and eagerly follow by deeds the words they could understand. Now the holy man of God, Cuthbert, had so much skill and learning, and so much love to the divine lore which he had begun to teach, and such a light of angelic looks shone from him, that none of those present

durst hide the secrets of the heart from him, but all openly confessed their deeds, and their acknowledged sins bettered with true repentance, as he bade. He was wont chiefly to go through those places and to preach in those hamlets which were high up on rugged mountains, frightful to others to visit, and whose people by their poverty and ignorance hindered the approach of teachers. These hindrances he by pious labour and great zeal overcame, and went out from the monastery often a whole week, sometimes two or three, and often, also, for a whole month would not return home, but abode in the wild places, and called and invited the unlearned folk to the heavenly life both by the word of his love and by the work of his virtue."

Thus teaching the poor in the highest matters, and also showing them with his own hands how to till and sow—"it being the will of the Heavenly Giver that crops of grain should be up-growing" in waste places,—and how to find and husband water, Cuthbert, and such priests as he, spent their lives. But a change had passed over the Church in the last fifty years. The Bedes and Alcuins had died out, and left no successors. Learning was grossly neglected, and the slothful clergy had allowed things to come to such a pass that Alfred in his youth could find no master south of the Thames to teach him Latin. Even the study of the Scriptures was very negligently performed, and the education of the people was no longer cared for at all. Bishop Ealstan, soldier and statesman, had succeeded the Alcuins; and St.

Swithin, bent on advancing the interests of Rome, the St. Bonifaces and St. Cuthberts.

Still, however, the Church in Wessex, if not audibly preaching and prophesying, was very far from having gone dumb with old age. She had within her the seeds of strength and growth, for Rome had not laid her hand heavily on the western island. The advice given by Pope Gregory to St. Augustine, in answer to the questions of the latter as to the customs which should be insisted on in the new Church, had been on the whole faithfully followed. "It seems good and is more agreeable to me," writes the great statesman-pope, "that whatsoever thou hast found, either in the Roman Church, or in Gaul, or in any other, that was more pleasing to Almighty God, thou shouldst carefully choose that, and set it to be held fast in the Church of the English nation, which now yet is new in faith. For the things are not to be loved for places, but the places for good things. Therefore, what things thou choosest as pious, good, and right from each of sundry Churches, these gather thou together, and settle into a custom in the mind of the English nation." And again as to uncanonical marriages, which are to be resisted but not punished with denial of the Communion, "for at this time the Holy Church corrects some things through zeal, bears with some through mildness, overlooks some through consideration; and so bears and overlooks that often by bearing and overlooking she checks the opposing evil."

And the policy had answered in many ways.

England had still the inestimable boon of services in her own tongue, and a clergy who were not celibate. So the Church had prospered, and the land was full of noble churches, abbeys, monasteries; but the ecclesiastics had not emancipated themselves from the civil governor, and their persons and property were answerable to him for breach of the laws of the realm. Mortmain had not yet become the "dead hand;" and while Church lands were at least as well tilled and cared for as those of king or thegn, and sent their equal quota of fighting men to the field (often led by such bishops as Ealstan of Sherborne, whom Alfred must have known well in his youth), Church establishments were the refuge for thousands of men and women, the victims of the wild wars of those wild times, the seats of such little learning as was to be found in the land, and the chief places in which working in metals, and weaving, and other manual industries could be learned or successfully practised.

Yet pagan traditions still to some extent held their own. For instance, the descent of the royal race of Cerdic, from which Alfred sprung, from the old Teuton gods, is as carefully traced by Bishop Asser and other chroniclers up to "Woden, who was the son of Frithewalde, who was the son of Trealaf, who was the son of Frithawulf, who was the son of Geta, whom the Pagans worshipped as a god;" as the further steps which carry the line on up to "Sceaf the son of Noah, who was born in the Ark." Pagan rites and ceremonies,

modified in many ways, but clearly traceable to their origin, were common enough. Still the two centuries and upwards since St. Augustine's time had done their work. England was not only in name a Christian country, but a living faith in Christ had entered into, and was practically the deepest and strongest force in, the national life. The conditions of faith and worship amongst the West Saxons, and generally the relations of his people with the Invisible, if not wholly satisfactory, were yet of a hopeful kind for a young prince of the royal race of Cerdic.

In other departments of human life in Wessex the outlook had also much of hopefulness in it, as well as deep causes of anxiety, for Alfred, as he grew up in his father's court. That court was a migratory one. The King of the West Saxons had no fixed home. Wherever in the kingdom the need was sorest, there was his place; and so from Kent to Devonshire, from the Welsh Marches to the Isle of Wight, we find him moving backwards and forwards, wherever a raid of Britons or Danes, the consecration of a church, a quarrel between two of his aldermen, the assembly of his Great Council, might call him. The government lies indeed heavily on his shoulders. He must be the first man in fight, in council, in worship, in the chase. True he can do no imperial act, cannot make a law, impose a tax, call out an army, or make a grant of folkland, without the sanction of his witan; but in all things the initiative is with him, and without him the witan is powerless.

That famous Council, common to all the Teutonic

tribes, had by this time amongst the West Saxons lost its original character of a gathering of all freemen. Probably no one below the rank of thegn attended the meetings of the witan in the time of Ethelwulf. The thegn was, however, simply an owner of land, and so a seat in the Great Council was in fact open to any cheorl, even it would seem to any thrall who could earn or win as his own five hides of land, a church, a kitchen, a bell-house, and a burghate seat.

The possession of land, then, was the first object with the Englishman of the ninth, as it is with the Englishman of the nineteenth century. At that time the greater part of the kingdom was still folkland, belonging to the nation, and only alienable by the king and his witan. When, however, any portion of the common inheritance was so alienated, the grantee held of no feudal lord, not even of the king. As a rule, the land became his in a sense in which, theoretically at least, no man has owned an acre in England since the Norman Conquest. Subject only to marching to meet invasion, and the making and restoring of roads and bridges, the Saxon freeholder held his land straight from the Maker of it.

But it is not only in the case of the common or folkland that a strong tinge of what would now be called socialism manifests itself in the life of our forefathers. Teutonic law, as Mr. Kemble has shown, bases itself on the family bond. The community in which he is born and lives, the guild to which he has bound himself, the master whom he serves, are responsible for the misdoings of the citizen crafts-

man, servant. The world-old question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" was answered with emphasis in the affirmative here in England a thousand years back. Indeed the responsibility was carried in some directions to strange lengths, for it seems that if a man should "for three nights entertain in his house a merchant or stranger, and should supply him with food, and the guest so received should commit a crime, the host must bring him to justice or answer for it." On the other hand, so jealous were our fathers of vagabonds in the land, that "if a stranger or foreigner should wander from the highway, and then neither call out nor sound horn, he is to be taken for a thief and killed, or redeemed by fine," for in truth there are so many pagan Danes, and other disreputable persons, scattered up and down the land, that society must protect itself in a summary manner.

This it did by laws which, up to Alfred's time, were administered under the king by aldermen. These great officers presided over shires, or smaller districts, and held an authority which, under weak kings, amounted almost to independence. The offices were hereditary, and no special training, or education of any kind, was required of the holders. Simple as the code of King Ina was, such judges were not competent to administer it; and Alfred, when at length he had time for them, found the most searching reforms required in this department.

This code of Ina, the one in force in Wessex, was mainly a list of penalties for murder, assaults, rob-

beries, injuries to forests and cattle. It contained also provisions as to the treatment of slaves, who formed a considerable portion of the population. They were for the most part Welsh, and other prisoners of war, or men who had been sentenced to servitude. The laws were enforced by fine or corporal punishment, imprisonment being unknown in the earlier codes. Such as they were, the laws of the Anglo-Saxons were at least in their own mother tongue, and could be understood by the people. In the king's and aldermen's courts, as well as in church and at the altar, the Englishman was able to plead and pray in his own language, a strong proof of the vigour of the national life, after making allowance for all the advantages of insular position, and fortunate accident.

We may note also that these islanders are singularly just to their women, far more so than their descendants on either side of the Atlantic have come to be after the lapse of a thousand years. Married women could sue and be sued, and inherit and dispose of property of all kinds. Women could attend the shire-gemot, even the witena-gemot—could sit, that is, on vestries, or in parliament—and were protected by special laws in matters where their weakness of body would otherwise place them at a disadvantage. Our fathers acknowledged, and practically enforced, the equality of the "spindle half" and the "spear-half" of the human family.

Above the servile class, or the thralls, the nation was divided broadly into "eorl" and "cheorl," all of

whom were freemen, the former gently born, and possessing privileges of precedence, which gather surely enough round certain families in races amongst whom birth is reverenced.

Under such conditions of life then our West Saxon fathers were living in the middle of the ninth century. A stolid, somewhat heavy people, entirely divorced from their old wandering propensities, and settling down, too rapidly perhaps, into plodding, money-making habits, in country and town and cloister, but capable of blazing up into white battle heat, and of fighting with untameable stubbornness, when their churches, or homes, or flocks are threatened; capable also, not unfrequently, of rare heroism and self-sacrifice when a call they can understand comes to them. A nation capable of great things under the hand of a true king.

CHAPTER III.

CHILDHOOD.

IN the year 849, when Alfred was born at the royal burgh of Wantage, the youngest child of Æthelwulf and Osberga, the King of the West Saxons had already established his authority as lord over the other Teutonic kingdoms in England. Until the time of Egbert, the father of Æthelwulf, this overlordship had shifted from one strong hand to another amongst the reigning princes, each of whom, as occasion served, rose and strove for the dignity of bretwalda, as it was called. Now it would be held by a Mercian, then by a Northumbrian, and again by a king of East Anglian or Kentish men. But when, in the year 800, the same in which the Emperor Charlemagne was crowned by the Pope, the Great Council of Wessex elected the Ætheling Egbert king of the West Saxons, all such contention came to an end. For Egbert, exiled from his own land by the bretwalda, Offa of Mercia, had spent thirteen years in the service of Charlemagne, and had learned in that school how to consolidate and govern kingdoms. He reigned thirty-seven years in England, and at his death all the land owned him as over-king, though the Northum-

brians, Mercians, and East Anglians still kept their own kings and great councils, who governed within their own borders as Egbert's men. In Egbert's later charters he is called King of the English, and the name of Anglia was by him given to the whole kingdom.

It is said that the last bretwalda and first king of all England felt uneasy forebodings as to the destiny of his kingdom when he was leaving it to his son and successor. Ethelwulf, from his youth up, had been of a strongly devotional turn, and was too much under the influence of the clergy to please his father. He would probably have followed his natural bent, and entered holy orders, but that Egbert had no other son. So as early as 828 he had been made King of Kent, and soon afterwards married Osberga, the daughter of his cup-bearer Oslac. There in Kent, under the eye of Egbert, he reigned for ten years, not otherwise than creditably, making head against the Danish pirates, who were already appearing almost yearly on the coast, in a manner not unworthy of his great father and still greater son. Indeed, if he was swayed more than his father liked by churchmen, the influence of Ealstan, the soldier-bishop of Sherborne, would seem to have been as powerful with him as that of the learned and non-combatant Bishop Swithin of Winchester, afterwards saint. Nor did courage or energy fail him after he had succeeded to Egbert's throne, for we find him in the next few years commanding in person in several pitched battles with the Danes, the most important of which was fought in 851 at a place in Surrey which the chroniclers call

Aclea (the oak plain), and which is still named Ockley. The village lies a few miles south of Dorking, under Leith Hill, from which probably Ethelwulf's scouts marked the long line of Pagans, and signalled to the King their whereabouts. They were marching south, along the old Roman road, the remains of which may still be seen near the battlefield, heavy with the spoils of London, it is said, part of which city they had succeeded in sacking. Ethelwulf fell on them from the higher ground, and severely defeated them, recovering all the spoil. Again, a little later in the same year, at Sandwich in Kent, and after that Wessex was scarcely troubled with them for eight years. So now Ethelwulf had leisure to turn his thoughts to a pilgrimage to Rome, which he had had it in his mind to make ever since he had been on the throne. But two years passed and still he was not ready to start, and in 853 Buhred, king of Mercia, applied to him as his over-lord for help against the Welsh. Then Ethelwulf marched himself against the Welsh with Buhred, and pursued their king, Roderic Mawr, to Anglesey, where he acknowledged Ethelwulf as his over-lord, who returning in triumph to Wessex, there at the royal burgh of Chippenham gave his daughter Ethelswitha to Buhred as his wife.

Being thus hindered himself from starting on his pilgrimage, Ethelwulf in that same year sent his young son Alfred, of whom he was already more fond than of his elder sons, to Rome, with an honourable escort. There the boy of five was received by Leo IV. as his son by adoption, and, it would seem, anointed

him king of the West Saxons. The fact is recorded both in the Saxon Chronicle and in that of Asser, who upon such a point would probably have the King's own authority. Whether a step so contrary to all English custom was taken by Ethelwulf's request, in order to found a claim to the succession for his favourite son, is unknown. In any case, no such special claim was ever urged by Alfred himself.

Leo was no unworthy spiritual father to such a boy. He was busy at this time with the enclosure of the quarter of the Vatican, the restoration of the old walls and fortifications, and the arming and inspiriting of the Romans. Moorish pirates had been lately in the suburbs of the Eternal City, and had profaned the tombs of the Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul. What with pagan Danes in the northern seas, and Moors in the Mediterranean, the coasts of Christendom had little rest a thousand years ago, and it behoved even the Holy Father to look to his fighting gear and appliances.

How long Alfred stayed at Rome on this occasion is uncertain; but if the opinion which would seem to be gaining ground amongst students is correct—that he did not return, but waited the arrival of Ethelwulf two years later—we must give up the well-known story of his earning the book of Saxon poems from his mother.

This is related by Asser as having happened when he was twelve years old or more, which is clearly impossible, as his mother Osberga must have been dead before 856, when his father married Judith, as

we shall hear presently. However, the tale is thus told by the old chronicler, the personal friend of Alfred: "On a certain day, his mother was showing him and his brothers a book of Saxon poetry which she held in her hand, and said, 'Whichever of you shall first learn this book shall have it for his own.' Moved by these words, or rather by a divine inspiration, and allured by the illuminated letters, he spoke before his brothers, who though his seniors in years were not so in grace, and answered, 'Will you really give that book to the one of us who can first understand and repeat it to you?' Upon which his mother smiled and repeated what she had said. So Alfred took the book from her hand and went to his master to read it, and in due time brought it again to his mother and recited it."

Now Alfred, one regrets to remark, before his first journey to Rome, could scarcely have been old enough to get by heart a book of poems, though he might have done so after his return, and before his second journey in his father's train.

This happened in 855. Before starting, Ethelwulf, by charter signed in the presence of the bishops Swithin and Ealstan, gave one-tenth of his land throughout the kingdom for the glory of God and his own eternal salvation; or, as some chroniclers say, released one-tenth of all lands from royal service and tribute, and gave it up to God. In that same year we may also note that an army of the Pagans first sat over winter in the Isle of Sheppey.

A bright brave boy, full of the folk-lore of his own

people, with a mind of rare power and sensitiveness and docile, loving, reverent soul, crossing France in the train of a king, and that king his own father—entertained now at the court of the grandson of Charlemagne, now at the castles of warrior nobles, now by prelates whose reputation as learned men is still alive—traversing the great Alps, and through the garden of the world approaching once again the Eternal City, renewing the memories of his childhood amongst its ruins and shrines and palaces, under the sky of Italy—one cannot but feel that such an episode in his young life must have been full of fruit for him upon whom were so soon to rest the burden of a life and death struggle with the most terrible of foes, and of raising a slothful and stolid nation out of the darkness and exhaustion in which that struggle had left them?

And what a year was this of A.D. 855 for a young prince with open mind and quick eye to spend in Rome! His godfather, the brave old Pope Leo, on his deathbed, dead probably before the arrival of the Saxon pilgrims; the election and inauguration of Benedict the Third, without appeal to or consultation with the Emperor Lothaire, swiftly following—as swiftly followed by protest of said Emperor, riots, and the flight and speedy return in triumph of Benedict to the chair of St. Peter; the illness and death of Lothaire himself, the whispered stories of the struggle for his corpse between the devils and the startled but undaunted monks of Pruim (*circumstantibus corpus ejus trahi et detrahi videretur, sed monachis orantibus*

dæmones sunt fatigati); the entrance of young Imperator Lewis—all these things Alfred must have seen and heard with his own eyes and ears in that eventful year.[1]

Meantime whether Pope or Emperor, clerical or imperial party, were uppermost for the moment, we may be sure that the Englishmen were received and treated with all honour. For Ethelwulf, besides the homage and reverence of an enthusiastic pilgrim, brought with him costly gifts, a crown four pounds in weight, two dishes, two figures, all of pure gold, urns silver-gilt, stoles and robes of richest silk interwoven with gold. All these, with munificent sums of outlandish coin, this king with a name which no Roman can write or speak, brings for the holy father and St. Peter's shrine. Before his departure, too, he has rebuilt and re-endowed the Saxon schools, and promised 300 marks yearly from his royal revenues, 100 each for the filling of the Easter lamps on the shrines of St. Peter and St. Paul with finest oil, 100 for the private purse of their successor.

It was not till after Easter in the next year that the royal pilgrim took thought of his people in the far west, and turned his face homewards, arriving again at the court of Charles the Bald in the early summer of 856. Through the long vista of years we can still get a bright gleam or two of light upon that court in those same days.

[1] Did he also see the elevation or attempted elevation of Pope Joan to the papacy? It is a papal legend that an Englishwoman by descent, and Joan by name, was elected on the death of Leo IV.

Notwithstanding the troubles which were pressing on his kingdom from the Danes and Northmen on his coasts; from turbulent nephew Pepin, with infidel Saracens for allies, on the south; from disloyal nobles in Aquitaine itself,—the court of Charles the Bald was at once stately and magnificent, and the centre of all that could be called high culture outside of Rome. Charles himself, like Ethelwulf, was under the influence of priests, who in fact ruled for him. But the head of them, Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, was before all things a statesman and a Frenchman, who would maintain jealously his sovereign's authority and the liberties of the national Church; could even on occasion rebuke popes for attempted interference with the temporal affairs of distant kingdoms, which "kings constituted by God permit bishops to rule in accordance with their decrees."

Both king and minister were glad to gather scholars and men of note and piety round them; and at Compiègne, or Verberie, in these months, Alfred must have come to know at any rate Grimbald, and John Erigena, the former (if not both) of whom, in after years, at his invitation, came over to live with him and teach the English. John, an Irishman by adoption, if not by birth, was in fact at this time master of the school of the palace, or, as we should say, tutor to the royal family. In the schoolroom Alfred must have been welcomed by Judith, a beautiful and clever girl of fourteen years of age or thereabouts; and Charles, the boy-king of Aquitaine, scarcely older than himself, lately sent home

from those parts by the nobles. They there, we may fancy, reading and talking with John the Irishman on many subjects. He, for his part, for the moment, at the instigation of Hincmar, is engaged in discussion with Abbot Pascasius, who is troubling the minds of the orthodox with speculations as to the nature and manner of the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist; with the German monk Gotteschalk, who is inviting all persons to consider the doctrine of free-will with a view to its final settlement to the satisfaction of the good folk. John, the Irishman, is ready enough to do Hincmar's bidding, does in fact do battle with both Pascasius and Gotteschalk, but seems likely to finally settle nothing of consequence in relation to these controversies, as he (not, we should imagine, to the satisfaction of Archbishop Hincmar) proves to be a strenuous maintainer of the right of private judgment, and human reason, instead of an orthodox defender of the faith.

Alfred must have been roused unpleasantly from his studies in the school of the palace, by the news that his father is about to marry the young Judith, his fellow-pupil. This ill-starred betrothal takes place in July, and on October 1st, at the palace of Verberie, the marriage between the Saxon king of sixty and upwards, and the French girl of fourteen, is celebrated with great magnificence, Hincmar himself officiating. The ritual used on the occasion is said to be still extant. Judith was placed by her husband's side and crowned queen.

The news of which crowning was like to have wrought sore trouble in England, for the Great Council of Wessex had made a law in the first year of King Egbert's reign, that no woman should be crowned queen of the West Saxons. This they did because of Eadburgha, the wife of Beorhtric, the last king. She being a woman of jealous and imperious temper had mixed poison in the cup of Warr, a young noble, her husband's friend, of which cup he died, and the king having partaken of it, died also. And Eadburgha fled, first to Charlemagne, who placed her over a convent. Expelled from thence she wandered away to Italy, and died begging her bread in the streets of Pavia. The West Saxons therefore settled that they would have no more queens. So when Ethelbald, the eldest living son of the King, who had been ruling in England in his father's absence, heard of this crowning, he took counsel with Ealstan the bishop, and Eanwulf the great alderman of Somerset, and it is certain that they and other nobles met and bound themselves together by a secret oath in the forest of Selwood—the great wood, silva magna, or Coit mawr, as we learn from Asser, the British called it. Whether the object of their oath was the dethronement of King Ethelwulf is not known, but it may well be that it was so, for on his return he found his people in two parts, the one ready to fight for him, and the other for his son.

But Ethelwulf with all his folly was a good man, and would not bring such evil on his kingdom. So he parted it with his son, he himself retaining Kent

and the crown lands, and leaving Wessex to Ethelbald. The men of Kent had made no such law as to women, and there Judith reigned as queen with her husband for two years.

Then the old King died, and, to the horror and scandal of the whole realm, Judith his widow was in the same year married to Ethelbald, "contrary to God's prohibition and the dignity of a Christian, contrary also to the custom of all the Pagans." This Ethelbald, notwithstanding the scandal and horror, carries the matter with a high hand his own way. A bold, bad man, for whose speedy removal we may be thankful, in view of the times which are so soon coming on his country.

Let us here finish the strange story of this princess, through whom all our sovereigns since William the Conqueror trace their descent from the Emperor Charlemagne. She lived in England for yet two years, till the death of Ethelbald, in 860, when, selling all her possessions here, she went back to her father's court. From thence she eloped, in defiance of her father, but with the connivance of her young brother Lewis, with Baldwin Bras-de-fer, a Flemish noble. The young couple had to journey to Rome to get their marriage sanctioned, and make their peace with Pope Nicholas I., to whom the enraged Charles had denounced her and her lover. Judith, however, seems to have had as little trouble with his Holiness as with all other men, and returned with his absolution, and letters of commendation to her father. Charles thereupon made her husband Count of

Flanders, and gave him all the country between the Scheld, the Sambre, and the sea, "that he might be the bulwark of the Frank kingdom against the Northmen."

This trust Baldwin faithfully performed, building the fortress of Bruges, and ruling Flanders manfully for many years. And our Alfred, though, we may be sure, much shocked in early years at the doings of his young stepmother, must have shared the fate of the rest of his sex at last, for we find him giving his daughter Elfrida as wife to Baldwin, second Count of Flanders, the eldest son of Judith. From this Baldwin the Second, and Alfred's daughter Elfrida, the Conqueror's wife Matilda came, through whom our sovereigns trace their descent from Alfred the Great. And so the figure of fair, frail, fascinating Judith flits across English history in those old years, the woman who next to his own mother must have had most influence on our great king.

CHAPTER IV.

CNIHTHOOD.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
Even by ruling himself after Thy word."

THE question of questions this, at the most critical time in his life for every child of Adam who ever grew to manhood on the face of our planet; and so far as human experience has yet gone, the answer of answers. Other answers have been, indeed, forthcoming at all times, and never surely in greater number or stranger guise than at the present time: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" Even by ruling himself in the faith "that human life will become more beautiful and more noble in the future than in the past." This will be found enough "to stimulate the forces of the will, and purify the soul from base passion," urge, with a zeal and ability of which every Christian must desire to speak with deep respect, more than one school of our nineteenth century moralists.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" Even by ruling himself on the faith, "that it is probable that God exists, and that death is not the end of life;" or again, "that this is the only

world of which we have any knowledge at all." Either of these creeds, says the philosopher of the clubs, if held distinctly as a dogma and consistently acted on, will be found "capable of producing practical results on an astonishing scale." So one would think, but scarcely in the direction of personal holiness, or energy. Meantime, the answer of the Hebrew psalmist, 3,000 years old, or thereabouts, has gone straight to the heart of many generations, and I take it will scarcely care to make way for any solution likely to occur to modern science or philosophy. Yes, he who has the word of the living God to rule himself by—who can fall back on the strength of Him who has had the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil—may even in this strange disjointed time of ours carry his manhood pure and unsullied through the death-grips to which he must come with "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." He who will take the world, the flesh, and the devil by the throat in his own strength, will find them shrewd wrestlers. Well for him if he escape with the stain of the falls which he is too sure to get, and can rise up still a man, though beaten and shamed, to meet the same foes in new shapes in his later years. New shapes, and ever more vile, as the years run on. "Three sorts of men my soul hateth," says the son of Sirach, "a poor man that is proud, a rich man that is a liar, and an old adulterer that doateth."

We may believe the Gospel history to be a fable, but who amongst us can deny the fact, that each son of

man has to go forth into the wilderness—for us, "the wilderness of the wide world in an atheistic century"—and there do battle with the tempter as soon as the whisper has come in his ear: "Thou too art a man; eat freely. All these things will I give thee."

Amongst the Anglo-Saxons the period between childhood and manhood was called "cnihthood," the word "cniht" signifying both a youth and a servant. The living connexion between cnihthood and service was never more faithfully illustrated than by the young Saxon prince, though he had already lost the father to whom alone on earth his service was due. The young nobles of Wessex of Alfred's time for the most part learnt to run, leap, wrestle, and hunt, and were much given to horse-racing and the use of arms; but beyond this, we know from Alfred himself, that neither their fathers or they had much care to go. Doubtless, however, here and there were clerical men, like Bishop Wilfrid in the previous century, to whom nobles sent their sons to be taught by him; and when full-grown, "to be dedicated to God if they should choose it, or otherwise to be presented to the king in full armour." It is not probable that Alfred ever had the advantage of such tuition, as he makes no mention of it himself. We do not know exactly how or when he learnt to read or write, but the story of how he met the young man's foes in the hey-day of his youth and strength comes to us in Bishop Asser's life, precisely enough, though in the language and clothing of a far-off time, with which we are little in sympathy. It seems better, however, to leave it

as it stands. Any attempt to remove what we should call the miraculous element out of it would probably take away all life without rendering it the least more credible to readers of to-day.

As he advanced through the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than those of his brothers, and in look, speech, and manners he was more graceful than they. He was already the darling of the people, who felt that in wisdom and other qualities he surpassed all the royal race. Alfred then being a youth of this fair promise, while training himself diligently in all such learning as he had the means of acquiring, and especially in his own mother tongue, and the poems and songs which formed the chief part of Anglo-Saxon literature, was not unmindful of the culture of his body, and was a zealous practiser of hunting in all its branches, and hunted with great perseverance and success. Skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, the good Bishop here adds, are amongst the gifts of God, and are given to men of this stamp, as we ourselves have often witnessed.

But before all things he was wishful to strengthen his mind in the keeping of God's commandments; and, finding that the carnal desires and proud and rebellious thoughts which the devil, who is ever jealous of the good, is apt to breed in the minds of the young, were likely to have the mastery of him, he used often to rise at cock-crow in the early mornings, and repairing to some church, or holy place, there cast himself before God in prayer that he might do nothing contrary to His holy

will. But finding himself still hard bested, he began at such times to pray as he lay prostrate before the altar, that God in His great mercy would strengthen his mind and will by some sickness, such as would be of use to him in the subduing of his body, but would not show itself outwardly or render him powerless or contemptible in worldly duties, or less able to benefit his people. For King Alfred from his earliest years held in great dread leprosy, and blindness, and every disease which would make a man useless or contemptible in the conduct of affairs. And when he had often and with much fervour prayed to this effect, it pleased God to afflict him with a very painful disease, which lay upon him with little respite until he was in his twentieth year.

At this age he became betrothed to her who was afterwards his wife, Elswitha, the daughter of Ethelred, the Earl of the Gaini in Mercia, whom the English named Mucil, because he was great of body and old in wisdom. Alfred, then at that time being on a visit to Cornwall for the sake of hunting, turned aside from his sport, as his custom often was, to pray in a certain chapel in which was buried the body of St. Guerir. There he entreated God that He would exchange the sickness with which he had been up to that time afflicted for some other disease, which should in like manner not render him useless or contemptible. And so, finishing his prayers, he got up and rode away, and soon after perceived within himself that he was made whole of his old sickness.

So his marriage was celebrated in Mercia, to which came great numbers of people, and there was feasting which lasted through the night as well as by day. In the midst of which revelry Alfred was attacked by sudden and violent pain, the cause of which neither they who were then present, nor indeed any physician in after years, could rightly ascertain. At the time, however, some believed that it was the malignant enchantment of some person amongst the guests, others that it was the special spite of the devil, others again that it was the old sickness come back on him, or a strange kind of fever. In any case from that day until his forty-fourth year, if not still later, he was subject to this same sickness, which frequently returned, giving him the most acute pain, and, as he thought, making him useless for every duty. But how far the King was from thinking rightly in this respect, those who read of the burdens that were laid on him, and the work which he accomplished, can best judge for themselves.

We must return, however, to the death of Ethelwulf, which happened, as we heard above, A.D. 858. That king, with a view, as he supposed, to prevent strife after his death, had induced the West Saxon witan to agree to the provisions of his will, and to sign it by some of their foremost men. These provisions were, that Ethelbald his eldest surviving son, who had rebelled against him, should remain king of Wessex, and, if he should die childless, should be succeeded by his two youngest brothers, Ethelred and Alfred, in succession; while Ethelbert, the second son,

should be king of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, with no right of succession to the greater kingdom. Thus even in his death Ethelwulf was preparing trouble for his country, for the kingdom of Kent could not now have been separated from Wessex without war, nor was it likely that Ethelbert would accept his exclusion from the greater succession. His estates and other property the King divided between his children, providing that his lands should never lie fallow, and that one poor man in every ten, whether native or foreigner, of those who lived on them, should be maintained in meat, drink, and clothing by his successors for ever.

From 858 then, after their father's death, Ethelred and Alfred lived in Kent with their brother Ethelbert until 860, when King Ethelbald died, and his widow Judith retired to France. Upon this event, had the younger brothers been self-seekers, or had either of them insisted on the right of succession, given to them by the will of their father, and sanctioned by the witan, the south of England would have seen wars of succession such as those which raged on the Continent during that same century between the descendants of Charlemagne. Then Wessex and Kent must have fallen an easy prey to the pagan hosts which were already gathering for the onslaught, as happened in Northumbria and East Anglia. But at this juncture the royal race of Cerdic were free from such ambitions, and Ethelred and Alfred allowed Ethelbert to ascend the throne of Wessex, and continued to live with him. He died in 866, after a peaceful and honourable reign of nearly six years, and there was

grief throughout the land, say the chroniclers, when he was buried in Sherborne minster. Nevertheless we cannot but note that in 864 he had allowed a pagan army to establish themselves in the Isle of Thanet without opposition, and in 860 had left the glory of avenging the plunder of Winchester by another roving band to Osric alderman of Hants, and Ethelwulf alderman of Berks. It was high time that the sceptre of the West Saxons should pass into stronger hands, for within a few months of the accession of Ethelred the great host under Hinguar and Hubba landed in East Anglia, which was never afterwards cast out of the realm, and for so many years taxed the whole strength of the southern kingdoms under the leading of England's greatest king.

Alfred was now Crown Prince, next in succession to the throne under the will of his father, which had been accepted by the witan. Under the same will he was also entitled in possession to his share of certain royal domains and treasures, which were thereby devised to Ethelbald, Ethelred, and him, in joint tenancy. He had already waived his right to any present share of this heritage once, on the accession of Ethelbert to the West Saxon kingdom. Now that the brother nearest to himself in age has succeeded he applies for a partition, and is refused. The whole of these transactions are so characteristic of the times and the man, that we must pause yet for a few moments over them. We have his own careful, and transparently truthful, account of them, in the recitals to his will, which run as follow.

"I, Alfred, by God's grace king, and with the counsel of Ethelred Archbishop, and all the witan of the West Saxons witness, have considered about my soul's health, and about my inheritance, that God and my elders gave me, and about that inheritance which King Ethelwulf my father bequeathed to us three brothers, Ethelbald, Ethelred, and me, and which of us soever were longest liver that he should take it all. But when it came to pass that Ethelbald died, Ethelred and I, with the witness of all the West Saxon witan, our part did give in trust to Ethelbert the king our brother, on the condition that he should deliver it back to us as entire as it then was when we did make it over to him; as he afterwards did (on his death) both that which he took by our joint gift and that which he himself had acquired. When it happened that Ethelred succeeded, then prayed I him before all our nobles that we two the inheritance might divide, and he would give to me my share. Then said he to me that he might not easily divide, for that he had at many different times formerly taken possession. And he said, both of our joint property and what he had acquired, that after his days he would give it to no man rather than to me, and I was therewith at that time well satisfied."

Why should a young prince otherwise occupied in the training of his immortal soul, and wrestlings with principalities and powers, take more account now of this inheritance? Let it rest then as it is.

"But it came to pass that we were all despoiled by the heathen folk. Then we consulted concerning our

children (Alfred by this time having married) that they would need some support to be given by us out of these estates as to us had been given. Then were we in council at Swinbeorg, when we two declared in the presence of the West Saxon nobles, that whichsoever of us two should live longest should give to the other's children those lands which we ourselves had acquired, and those that Ethelwulf the king gave to us two while Ethelbald was living, except those which he gave to us three brothers. And we gave each to other security that the longest liver of us should take land and treasure and all the possessions of the other, except that part which either of us to his children should bequeath."

In which sad tangle, which no man can unravel, the inheritance question rests at the death of King Ethelred in 871. There is the agreement indeed but what does it mean? Alfred will not himself decide it. Here is the Great Council of the West Saxons. Let them say whether or no he can deal with this part of the royal inheritance, or to whom it of right belongs. "So when the King died," Alfred goes on, "no man brought to me title-deed, or evidence that it was to be otherwise than as we had so agreed before witnesses, yet heard I of inheritance suits. Wherefore brought I Ethelwulf the king's will before our council at Langadene, and they read it before all the West Saxon witan. And after it was read, then prayed I them all for my love—and gave to them my troth that I never would bear ill-will to none of them that should speak right—that none of

them would neglect, for my love nor for my fear, to declare the common right, lest any man should say that I had excluded my kinsfolk whether old or young. And they then all for right pronounced, and declared that they could conceive no more rightful title nor hear of such in a title-deed; and they said, 'It is all delivered into thy hand, wherefore thou mayest bequeath and give it, either to a kinsman, or a stranger as may seem best to thee.'"

This council at Langadene was held most probably between the years 880 and 885, after Alfred had triumphed over all his enemies, and was deep already in his great social reforms. Under the sanction there given he distributes this part of the royal inheritance, as well as his own property, by his will, which we shall have to consider in its own place.

Thus then we get a second result of Alfred's cnihthood. We have already seen him curbing successfully the unruly passions of his youth; paying willingly with health and bodily comfort to win that victory, since it can be won by him at no lower price. At the death of Ethelbald, and again of Ethelbert, after he had grown to manhood and must have been conscious of his power to manage lands and men, we now find him standing aside at once, and allowing two elder brothers in succession to keep his share of the joint heritage. He at least will give no example in the highest places of the realm of strife about visible things, will make any sacrifice of lands or goods so that he maintain peace and brotherly love in his own family.

The tempter we may see has led this son of man into the wilderness without much success. The whisper "Take and eat" has met with a brave "Depart, Satan," from these royal lips. England may now look hopefully for true kingship and leading from him who has already learned to rule like a king in the temple of his own body and spirit.

We may notice for a third point that in these years of his cnihthood Alfred has gathered together the services of the hours (*celebrationes horarum*), with many of the Psalms—whether written by himself or not we cannot tell, probably not—but forming a small manual, or handbook, which he always carries in his bosom, and which will be found helpful to him in many days of sore trial.

With such garniture then of one kind or another, gathered together in these early years, the young crown prince stands loyally by the side of the young king his brother, looking from their western home over an England already growing dark under the shadow of a tremendous storm. When it bursts, will it spend itself on these Northumbrian and East Anglian coasts and kingdoms, or shall we too feel its rage? These must have been anxious thoughts for the young prince, questionings to which the answer was becoming month by month plainer and clearer at the time of his marriage. Within some six weeks of that ceremony he was already in arms in Mercia. Before the birth of his first child he was himself king, and nine pitched battles had been fought in his own kingdom of Wessex under his leadership.

CHAPTER V.

THE DANE.

"The day of the Lord cometh, it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations."

A STRANGE atmosphere of wild legend surrounds the group of tribes who, from the shores of the Baltic and the great Scandinavian peninsula, as well as from Denmark, in this ninth century fell upon all coasts of England; at first swooping down in small marauding bands in the summer months, plundering towns, villages, and homesteads, and disappearing before the winter storms; then coming in armies headed by kings and jarls, settling in large districts of the north and east, and from thence carrying fire and sword through the heart of Mercia and Wessex. They are of the same stock with the West Saxons and Jutes themselves, and speak a kindred language. Their kings also claim descent from Woden. The description of Tacitus applies to them as well as to their brother sea-rovers, who, four centuries before them, came over

under Hengist and Horsa, inflicting precisely that which their descendants are now to endure, and driving the old British stock back mile by mile from the Kentish and Sussex downs to the Welsh mountains and the Land's End.

Three centuries earlier, the Arthur of British legend had fought the Saxons in the very districts which a yet greater English king is now to hold against as terrible odds. These Northmen, Scandinavians, Danes, like the Saxons, elect their kings and chiefs, noble lineage and valour being the qualifications for the kingly office. Affairs of moment are decided by general assemblies, in which the kings speak first, and the rest in turn as they are eminent for valour, birth, and understanding. Disapproval is signified by a murmur, approval by the clashing of spears, for they come to their assemblies armed. The king surrounds himself by a brave and numerous band of companions in arms, his glory in peace and safety in war. It is dishonourable to the king not to be first in fight, it is infamy for his intimate comrades and followers to survive him in battle. But the power of the king is not unlimited; he sets an example of valour rather than commands. The chiefs have different ranks according to his judgment, and amongst his followers there is the keenest emulation who shall stand foremost in his favour. They would rather serve for wounds than plough and wait the harvest, for it seems to them the part of a dastard to earn by the sweat of the brow what may be gained by the glory of the

sword. Their women, too, are held in the same high estimation as those of the Saxons, and for the most part accompany them in their wanderings, and share their dangers and glories.

To such a political and social organization we must add a religious faith second to none invented by man, not excepting that of Mahomet, in its power of consecrating valour, and inspiring men with contempt of pain and death. The idea of a universal father, the creator of sky and earth, and of mankind, the governor of all kingdoms, though found in the Edda, has by this time faded out from the popular faith. Woden is now the chief figure in that weird mythology—"wuctan," the power of movement, soon changing into the god of battles, "who giveth victory, who reanimates warriors, who nameth those who are to be slain." This Woden had been an inspired teacher, as well as a conqueror, giving runes to these wild Northmen, a Scandinavian alphabet, and songs of battle. A teacher as well as a soldier, he had led them from the shores of the Black Sea (so their traditions told) to the fiords of Norway, the far shores of Iceland. Departed from amongst his people, he has drawn their hearts after him, and lives there above in Asgard, the garden of the gods. Here in his own great hall, Valhalla, the hall of Odin, he dwells; in that hall of heroes, into which the "Valkyrs," or "choosers of the slain," shall lead the brave, even into the presence of Odin, there to feast with him. This reward for the brave who die in battle; but for the coward? He shall be

thrust down into the realm of Hela, death, whence he shall fall to Nifhleim, oblivion, extinction, which is below in the ninth world.

Round the central figure of Woden cluster other gods. Chief of these, Balder the sun god, white, beautiful, benignant, who dies young—and Thor the thunder god, with terrible smiting hammer and awful brows, engaged mainly in expeditions into Jotun land, a chaotic world, the residence of the giants or devils, "frost," "fire," "tempest," and the like. Thor's attendant is "Thealfi," manual labour. In his exploits the thunder god is like Samson, full of unwieldy strength, simplicity, rough humour.

There is a tree of life too in that unseen world, Igdrasil, with its roots in Hela, the kingdom of death, at the foot of which sit the three "Nornas," the past, present, and future. Also the Scalds have a vision of supreme struggle of the gods and Jotuns, a day of the Lord, as the old Hebrew seers would call it, ending in a "Twilight of the gods," a sinking down of the created universe, with gods, Jotuns, and inexorable Time herself, into darkness—from which shall there not in due course issue a new heaven and new earth, in which a higher god and supreme justice shall at last reign?

Under the sway of such a faith, and of their lust of wild adventure, pressed from behind by teeming tribes ever pushing westward, lured on in front by the settled coasts of England and France, rich already in flocks and herds, in village, town, and abbey, each standing in the midst of fertile and well-tilled districts,

but surrounded by forests well adapted to cover the ambush or retreat of invaders, the sea-kings and their followers swept out year after year from the bays of Denmark and the fiords of Norway, crossing the narrow northern seas in their light half-decked boats, to spoil, and slay, and revel in "the play of swords, the clash of spear and buckler," "when the hard iron sings upon the high helmets." In the death-hymn of Regner Lodbrog are some thirty stanzas—each one beginning, "We fought with swords," and describing the joy of some particular battle—which trace the career of the old Norseman from the distant Goth-land, up the Vistula, across Europe, in the North-umbrian land, the isles of the south, the Irish plains, till he makes an end: "When in the Scottish gulfs, I gained large spoils for the wolves. We fought with swords. This fills me still with joy, because I know a banquet is preparing by the father of the gods. Soon in the hall of Odin we shall drink mead out of the skulls of our foes. A brave man shrinks not at death; I shall utter no repining words as I approach the palace of the gods. . . . The fates are come for me. Odin hath sent them from the habitation of the gods. I shall quaff full goblets among the gods. The hours of my life are numbered; I die laughing." Such are the last words which the Scalds put into the mouth of the grim old sea-king, dying in torment in the serpent-tower of Ella, to whom tradition points as the father of the two leaders of the first great Danish invasion of England, the terrible wave which broke on the East Anglian shores in the year that

Ethelred came to the throne. The death-hymn may be of uncertain origin, but at least it is a genuine and characteristic Bersirkir hymn; and if Lodbrog were not the father of Hinguar and Hubba, they would seem, at any rate, to have been filled with his spirit.

In 851 a band of Danes had first wintered in England, in the Isle of Thanet, and again in 855 another band wintered in the Isle of Sheppey; but these were small bodies, attempting no permanent settlement, and easily dislodged. This invasion towards the end of 866 was of a far different character. A great army of the Pagans, the Saxon Chronicle records, now came over and took up winter quarters among the East Angles, who would seem at first to have made some kind of truce with them, and even to have furnished them with provisions and horses. At any rate, for the moment the Pagans made no attack on East Anglia, but early in 867 crossed the Humber and swooped down upon York city, which they surprised and took.

There was civil war already in Northumbria at this time between Osbert the king, and Ella, a man not of royal blood, whom the Northumbrians had placed on the throne. Osbert, it is said, had outraged the wife of one of his nobles, Bruern Brocard by name, who received him hospitably while her husband was away at the coast on the king's business, watching for pirates. Whatever the cause, the civil feud raged so fiercely that the Danes were in the very heart of the kingdom before a blow was struck in its defence. Now at last, urged by the Northumbrian nobles, Osbert

and Ella made peace, joined their forces, and without delay marched on York. The pagan army fell back before them even to the city walls, which the Christians at once tried to storm, and were partially successful. A desperate fight took place within and without the walls, ending in the utter defeat of the Christians and the deaths of Osbert, Ella, and a crowd of nobles. The remainder of the people made peace with the army, whose descendants are probably still living in and round the city of York. At least their mark is there to this day in the street of Goodramgate, called after Gudrum or Goodrum, whom Hinguar and Hubba left as their deputy to hold down the city and district.

For the remainder of this year the army lay quiet, exhausted no doubt by that York fight, and waiting for reinforcements from Denmark. At this juncture, while the black cloud is gathering in the north, Ealstan, the famous warrior-bishop of Sherborne, goes to his rest in peace, leaving the young king and prince, the grandsons of his old liege lord, Egbert, who had picked him out fifty years before, with no wiser counsellor or braver soldier to stand by them in this hour of need.

Early in 868 Alfred journeys into Mercia to wed Elswitha, the daughter of Ethelred Mucil, as we have already heard. Scarcely can he have reached Wessex and installed his wife at Wantage, or elsewhere, when messengers in hot haste summon the king and him to the help of their brother-in-law, Buhred, king of Mercia. The pagan army is upon him. Stealing over swiftly and secretly, "like foxes,"

from Northumbria, through forest and waste, as is their wont, they have struck at once at a vital part of another Saxon kingdom, and stormed Nottingham town, which they now hold. Ethelred and Alfred were soon before Nottingham with a force drawn from all parts of Wessex, eager for battle. But the wily pagan holds him fast in castle and town, and the walls are high and strong. The king and prince watch in vain outside. Soon their troops, hastily mustered, must get back for harvest. They march south reluctantly, not, however, before a peace is made between their brother-in-law and the Pagans, under which the latter return to York, where they lie quiet for the whole of 869.

But this year also brought its own troubles to afflicted England — a great famine and mortality amongst men, and a pest among cattle. Such times can allow small leisure to a young prince who carries in his bosom that handbook in which the Psalms and services of the hours are written, and who has resolved for his part to be a true shepherd of his people, a king indeed, but one who will rule under the eye, and in the name of the King of kings.

The next year (870) is one full of sorrow, and of glory, for Christian England. It witnesses the utter destruction of another Saxon kingdom, adds one worthy English name to the calendar of saints, several to the roll of our heroes still remembered, and a whole people to the glorious list of those who have died sword in hand and steadfast to the last, for faith and fatherland.

In the late summer, one division of the pagan army leaving York take to their ships, and, crossing the Humber, fall on Lindesey (now Lincolnshire), and plunder and burn the monastery of Bardeney. The young Algar, alderman of the shire, the friend of Ethelred and Alfred, springs to arms, and calls out the brave men of the Fens. They flock to his standard, the rich cloisters of the district sending their full quota of fighting men under lay brother Toly, of Croyland Abbey. On the 21st of September, St. Maurice's Day, the Christian host fell on the Pagans at Kesteven, and in that first fight three kings were slain, and Algar pursued the Pagans to the entrance of their camp.

But help for the vanquished was at hand. The other division of the Pagans, in which were now five kings—Guthrum, Bagsac, Oskytal, Halfdene, and Amund—and the jarls Hinguar and Hubba, Frene, and the two Sidrocs, marching over land through Mercia, arrive on the field. Algar, Toly, and their comrades, now fearfully overmatched, receive the Holy Sacrament in the early morning, and stand there to win or die. Algar commands the centre of the Christian battle, Toly and Morcar the right wing, Osgot of Lindesey and Harding of Rehal (we cannot spare the names of one of them) the left. The Pagans, having buried their slain kings, hurl themselves on the Christian host, and through the long day Algar and his men stand together and beat back wave after wave of the sea-kings' onslaught. At last the Christians, deceived by a feigned retreat, break their solid ranks

and pursue. Then comes the end. The Pagans turn, stand, and surrounded and outnumbered, Algar, Toly, and their men die where they had fought, and a handful of youths only escape of all the Christian host to carry the fearful news to the monks of Croyland. The pursuers are on their track. Croyland is burnt and pillaged before the treasures can be carried to the forests.

Four days later Medeshamsted (Peterborough) shares the same fate; soon afterwards Huntingdon and Ely; and in all those fair shires scarcely man, woman, or child remain to haunt like ghosts the homes which had been theirs for generations. The pagan host, leaving the desolate land a wilderness behind them, turn south-east and make their headquarters at Thetford. Edmund, king of the East Anglians, a just and righteous ruler, very dear to his people—no warrior, it would seem, hitherto, but one who can at least do a brave leader's part—he now arms and fights fiercely with the Pagans, and is slain by them, with the greater part of his followers, near the village of Hoxne. Tradition says that the king was taken alive, and, refusing to play the renegade, was tied to a tree, and shot to death, after undergoing dreadful tortures. His head was struck off, and the corpse left for wolf or eagle, while his murderers fell on town and village, and minster and abbey, throughout all that was left of East Anglia, so that the few people who survived fled to the forests for shelter.

Nevertheless, a monk or two from Croyland, and

other faithful men of the eastern counties, managed to steal out of their hiding-places and take up the slain body and severed head of their good King Edmund. "They embalmed him with myrrh and sweet spices, with love, pity, and all high and awful thoughts, consecrating him with a very storm of melodious, adoring admiration and sun-dyed showers of tears; joyfully, yet with awe (as all deep joy has something of the awful in it), commemorating his noble deeds and godlike walk and conversation while on earth. Till at length the very Pope and cardinals at Rome were forced to hear of it; and they summing up as correctly as they well could with 'Advocatus Diaboli' pleadings, and their other forms of process, the general verdict of mankind declared: that he had in very fact led a hero's life in this world, and being now gone, was gone, as they conceived, to God above, and reaping his reward there." So King Edmund was canonized, and his body entombed in St. Edmund's shrine, where a splendid abbey in due time rose over it, some poor fragments of which may still be seen in the town of Bury St. Edmunds.

Alas for East Anglia! there was no one to take Edmund's place, to play the part for the eastern counties which Alfred played for Wessex a few years later. Edwold, the brother of Edmund, on whom the duty lay, "seeing that a hard lot had fallen on himself and his brother, retired to the monastery of Carnelia in Dorsetshire, near a clear well which St. Augustine had formerly brought out of the earth by prayer to baptize the people in. And there he led a hermit's

life on bread and water." So East Anglia remained for years a heathen kingdom, with Guthrum, the most powerful and latest comer of the pagan leaders, for king. In the dread pause of the few winter months of 870-71 we may fancy the brave young king of the West Saxons and the Etheling Alfred warning alderman and earl, bishop and mitred abbot, and thegn, throughout Wessex, that their turn had now come. There was nothing to delay the invaders for an hour between Thetford and the Thames. Their ships would be in the river, and their horsemen on the north bank, in the early spring. Then the last issue would have to be tried between Christian and Pagan, Saxon and Dane, for stakes of which not even Alfred could estimate the worth to England and the world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST WAVE.

"Blessed be the Lord my strength, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight."

CHRISTMAS 870–71 must have been a time of intense anxiety to the whole Christian people of Wessex. The young King had indeed shown himself already a prompt and energetic leader in his march to Nottingham at the call of his brother-in-law. But, unless perhaps in the skirmishes outside that beleaguered town in the autumn of 869, he had never seen blows struck in earnest; had never led and rallied men under the tremendous onset of the Bersirkir. Alfred, though already the darling of the people, had even less experience than Ethelred, who was at least five years older. He was still a very young man, skilled in the chase, and inured to danger and hardship, so far as hunting and manly exercises of all kinds could make him so, but as much a novice in actual battle as David when he stood before Saul, ruddy and of a fair complexion, but ready in the strength of his God, who had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, to go up with his sling and stone and fight with the Bersirkir of his day. And this gene-

ration of the West Saxons, who were now to meet in supreme life-and-death conflict such kings as Guthrum and Bagsac, such jarls as Hinguar and Sidroc, "the ancient one of evil days," and their followers—tried warriors from their youth up—were much in the same case as their young leaders. The last battle of any mark in Wessex had been fought eleven years back, in 860, when a pagan host "came up from the sea" and stormed and sacked Winchester. Osric alderman of Hampshire, and Ethelwulf alderman of Berkshire, as we have already heard, caught them on their return to their ships laden with spoil, and after a hard fight utterly routed them, rescued all the spoil, and had possession of the place of death. Of this Alderman Ethelwulf we shall hear again speedily, but Osric would seem to have died since those Winchester days. At any rate we have no mention of him, or indeed of any other known leader except Ethelwulf, in all that storm of battle which now sweeps down on the rich kingdom, and its stolid but indomitable sons.

In these days when our wise generation, weighed down with wealth and its handmaid vices on the one hand, and exhilarated by some tiny steps it has managed to make on the threshold of physical knowledge of various kinds on the other, would seem to be bent on ignoring its Creator and God altogether—or at least of utterly denying that He has revealed, or is revealing Himself, unless it be through the laws of Nature—one of the commonest demurrers to Christianity has been, that it is no faith for fighters, for the men who have to do the roughest and hardest work

for the world. I fear that some sections of Christians have been too ready to allow this demurrer, and fall back on the Quaker doctrines; admitting thereby that such "Gospel of the kingdom of heaven" as they can for their part heartily believe in, and live up to, is after all only a poor cash-gospel, and cannot bear the dust and dint, the glare and horror, of battle-fields. Those of us who hold that man was sent into this earth for the express purpose of fighting—of uncompromising and unending fighting with body, intellect, spirit, against whomsoever or whatsoever causeth or maketh a lie, and therefore, alas! too often against his brother man—would, of course, have to give up Christianity if this were true; nay, if they did not believe that precisely the contrary of this is true, that Christ can call them as plainly in the drum beating to battle, as in the bell calling to prayer, can and will be as surely with them in the shock of angry hosts as in the gathering before the altar. But without entering further into the great controversy here, I would ask readers fairly and calmly to consider whether all the greatest fighting that has been done in the world has not been done by men who believed, and showed by their lives that they believed, they had a direct call from God to do it, and that He was present with them in their work. And further (as I cheerfully own that this test would tell as much in favour of Mahomet as of Cromwell, Gustavus Adolphus, John Brown) whether, on the whole, Christian nations have not proved stronger in battle than any others. I would not press the point unfairly, or overlook such facts as

the rooting out of the British by these very West Saxons when the latter were Pagans; all I maintain is, that from the time of which we are speaking to the last great civil war in America, faith in the constant presence of God in and around them has been the support of those who have shown the strongest hearts, the least love of ease and life, the least fear of death and pain.

But we are wandering from the West Saxon kingdom and our hero in those early days of the year 871. The Christians were not kept long in suspense. As soon as the frost had broken up, Danish galleys were beating up the Thames, and Danish horsemen stealing their way across Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The kings Bagsac, Halfdene, and Guthrum, jarls Osbern, Frene, Harald, the two Sidrocs, and probably Hinguar, led the pagan host in this their greatest enterprise on British soil. Swiftly, as was their wont, they struck at a vital point, and seizing the delta which is formed by the junction of the Thames and Kennet, close to the royal burgh of Reading, threw up earthworks, and entrenched themselves there. Whether they also took the town at this time is not clear from the Chronicles, but most likely they did, and in any case here they had all they wanted in the shape of a stronghold, a fortified camp in which their spoils and the women and wounded could be left, and by which their ships could lie. Any reader who has travelled on the Great Western Railway has crossed the very spot, a few hundred yards east of the station. The present

racecourse must have been within the Danish lines.

Two days sufficed for rest and the first necessary works, and on the third a large part of the army started on a plundering and exploring expedition under two of their jarls. At Englefield, a village still bearing the same name, some six miles due west of Reading, in the vale of Kennet—where the present county member lives in a house which Queen Bess visited more than once—they came across Alderman Ethelwulf, with such of the Berkshire men as he had been able hastily to gather in these few days. The Christians were much fewer in number, but the brave Ethelwulf led them straight to the attack with the words, "They be more than we, but fear them not. Our Captain, Christ, is braver than they." The news of that first encounter must have cheered the King and Alfred, who were busy gathering their forces further west, for Ethelwulf slew one of the jarls and drove the plunderers back to their entrenchments with a great slaughter. The Saxon Chronicle says that one of the Sidrocs was the jarl slain at Englefield; but this could scarcely be, as the same authority, supported by Asser, gives both the Sidrocs on the death-roll of Ashdown. Four days afterwards Ethelred and Alfred march suddenly to Reading with a large force, and surprise and cut to pieces a number of the Pagans who were outside their entrenchments. Then, while the Saxons were preparing to encamp, kings and jarls rushed out on them with their whole power, and the tide of battle rolled backwards and

forwards over the low meadows outside the royal burgh, victory inclining now to one side, now to the other. In the end, after great slaughter on both sides, the Saxons gave way, and the young king and his brother fell back from Reading, leaving the body of the brave and faithful Ethelwulf among the dead. It is said that the Pagans dragged it to Derby. What matter! The strong soul had done its work, and gone to its reward. Small need of tombs for the bodies of the brave and faithful—of such men the whole land and the hearts of its people is the tomb.

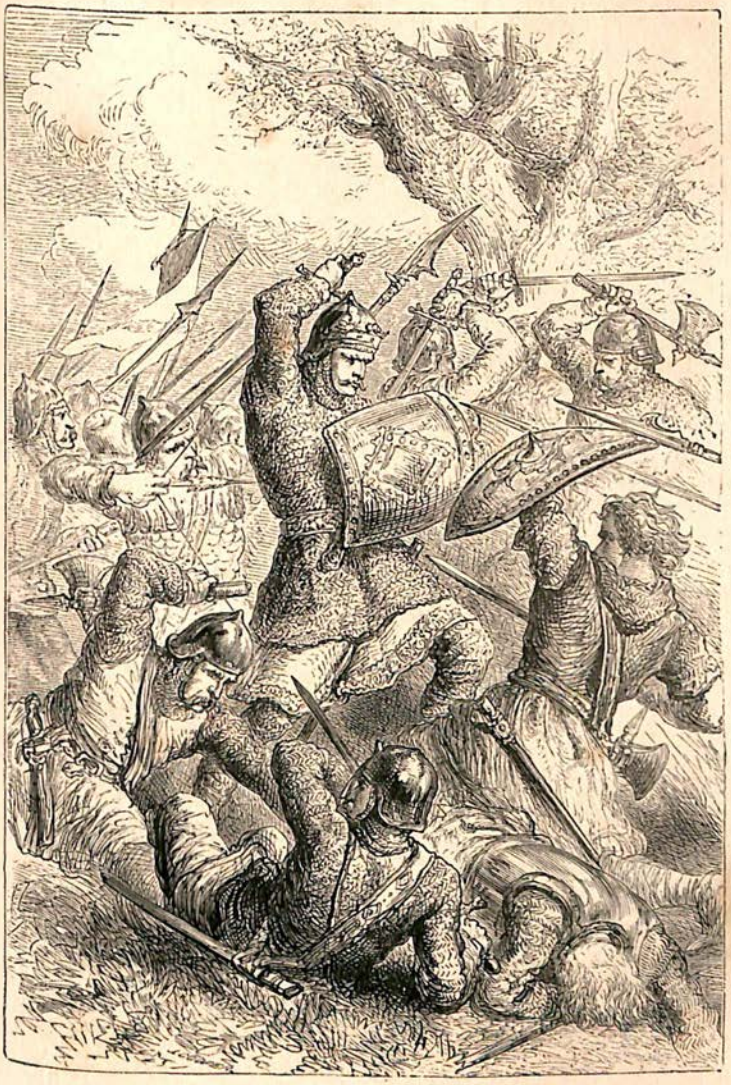
A few lines in a later chronicler have here deceived even so acute and accurate a writer as Dr. Pauli, who says that Ethelred and Alfred were pursued from Reading field as far as Twyford, and crossed the Thames at a ford near Windsor, which was unknown to the Danes. Had this really been so, they must have gone due east, away from all their resources, and, the battle having been fought on the south bank of the Thames, must have crossed into Mercia, leaving the whole of Wessex open to the pagan host. Dr. Pauli, and the authorities he has followed, going on this hypothesis, are at a loss as to the scene of the next great battle, that of Ascesdune, not knowing apparently that there is a district of that name in Berkshire, at the western end of the county, on the summit of the chalk hills which run through the county as a backbone from Goring to Swindon. Tradition agrees with the description of the field in the oldest chroniclers in marking this Ashdown as the spot where the great fight was fought. Ethelred and

Alfred then fell back with their broken bands along the south bank of the Thames westward, until they struck the hills, and then still back along the ancient track known as the Ridgeway, past Ilsley and past the royal burgh of Wantage, Alfred's birthplace, from which they probably drew the reinforcements which justified them in turning to bay on the fourth day after the disaster at Reading. The Pagans were on their track with their whole host (except King Guthrum and his men), in two divisions; one commanded by the two kings Bagsac and Halfdene, the other by the jarls. Ethelred, on perceiving this disposition of the enemy, divided his forces, taking command himself of the division which was to act against the kings, and giving the other to Alfred. Each side threw up hasty earthworks, the remains of which may be seen to this day on at least three spots of the downs, the highest point of which is White Horse Hill; and all of which, according to old maps, are included in the district known as Ashdown. That highest point had been seized by the Pagans, and here the opposing hosts rested by their watch-fires through the cold March night. We may fancy from the one camp the song of Regner Lodbrog beguiling the night watches:—"We fought with swords! Young men should march up to the conflict of arms. Man should meet man and never give ground. In this hath ever stood the nobleness of the warrior. He who aspires to the love of his mistress should be dauntless in the clash of arms." In the other camp we know that by one fire lay a youth who

carried in his bosom the Psalms of David written out in a fair hand, which he was wont to read in all intervals of rest. Here too is a son of Odin of the pure royal lineage, who will come to the clash of arms on the morrow in the strength of "the Lord of Hosts, who teacheth his hands to war and his fingers to fight."

At early dawn the hosts are on foot. Let Alfred's old friend tell the tale in his own words :—"Alfred, we have been told by some who were there and would not lie, marched up promptly with his men to give battle. But King Ethelred stayed long time in his tent at prayer, hearing the mass, and sent word that he would not leave it till the priest had done, or abandon God's help for that of man. And he did so too, which afterwards availed him much, as we shall declare more fully. Now the Christians had determined that King Ethelred with his men should fight the two pagan kings, and that Alfred his brother with his men should take the chance of war against the earls. Things being so arranged, the King remained long time in prayer, while the Pagans pressed on swiftly to the fight. Then Alfred, though holding the lower command, could no longer support the onslaught of the enemy without retreating, or charging upon them without waiting for his brother." A moment of fearful anxiety this, we may note, for the young prince. But he has a strong heart for such a crisis ; and, dreading the effect on his men of one step backwards, puts himself at their head and leads them up the slope against the whole pagan host "with the rush of a wild

boar" (*aprino more*). "For he too relied on the help of God," Asser goes on, and also we see had already learnt something from the Reading disaster, for "he formed his men in a dense phalanx to meet the foe," which was never broken in that long fight. Mass being over, Ethelred comes up to the help of his brother, and the battle raged along the whole hill-side. "But here I must inform those who are ignorant of the fact, that the field of battle was not equal for both sides. The Pagans occupied the higher ground, and the Christians came up from below. There was also in that place a single stunted thorn tree, which we have seen with our own eyes. Round this tree the opposing hosts came together with loud shouts from all sides, the one party to pursue their wicked course, the other to fight for their lives, their wives and children, and their country. And, when both sides had fought long and bravely, at last the Pagans by God's judgment gave way, being no longer able to abide the Christian onslaught, and after losing great part of their army broke in shameful flight. One of their two kings and five jarls were there slain, together with many thousand Pagans, who covered with their bodies the whole plain of Ashdown. There fell in that fight King Bagsac (by the hand, as some say, of Ethelred); Earl Sidroc the elder and Earl Sidroc the younger, Earl Osbern, Earl Frene, and Earl Harald. And all the pagan host pursued its flight, not only until night, but through the next day, even until they reached the stronghold from which they had come forth. The Christians followed, slaying all they could reach until



King Alfred at the Battle of Ashdown.—P. 76.

dark." Ethelward the chronicler, the great-grandson of Ethelred, adds, "Neither before or since was ever such slaughter known since the Saxons first gained England by their arms."

The whole story does not take more than ten lines in the chroniclers, but conceive what that short ten, or twenty minutes at most, must have been in the life of Alfred. A youth for the first time in independent command, with the memory of the mishap four days back at Reading as his only experience in war, opposed to two hostile armies each as numerous as his own, flushed with their late victory, and led by the most terrible warriors of the time—he has to decide there, peremptorily, the fate of England hanging on his judgment, whether he will give ground and wait for his brother, or himself attack. Stand still he cannot, as the enemy swarm on the slopes above, and partially covered by the formation of the ground, already ply his men with missiles to which they can make no useful reply. After that Ashdown dawn every future supreme moment and crisis of his eventful life must have come on him as child's-play. "Bagsac and the two Sidrocs, at the top of the down, with double my numbers, already overlapping my flanks—Ethelred still at mass—dare I go up at them? In the name of God and St. Cuthbert, yes." He who could so answer, and thereupon himself lead up the hill in wild-boar fashion (*aprino more*), has hereafter no question he need fear in the domain of war. That moment has hardened his nerve to flint, and his judgment, amid the clash of arms, to steel.

Through all those weary years of battle and misfortune that follow, there is in Alfred no sign of indecision or faint-heartedness.

Against any enemy but the Danes, such a victory as that of Ashdown would have been decisive for a generation, but the hopeless nature of the war which the West Saxons had now to maintain cannot be better illustrated than by the events which immediately follow. The scattered remains of the pagan army came back into the Reading entrenchments in the next few days, and there seem to have found Guthrum and his troops, with new reinforcements of plunderers from East Anglia and over the sea, upon whom they rallied at once. In a fortnight they are again ready for a foray, and, avoiding the chalk hills, the scene of their late defeat, a large band of them strike across the Kennet, and so away south-west, through new country into Hampshire. Ethelred and Alfred hastening down after them, catch them at Basing in a strong position, before which the Saxons are worsted, but, as is significantly added, the Pagans get no spoil in the expedition. One more battle the brave Ethelred was destined, about two months later, to fight for his people. It is said to have happened at a place called Merton, but could scarcely have been at the village in Surrey of that name, as is usually supposed. Guthrum would never have struck back through a country already pillaged, nor, had he done so, were Ethelred and Alfred likely to have followed, leaving the entrenched camp at Reading in their rear, and their own homes open to the

garrison. However, at the place called Merton by the chroniclers, wherever it may be, the two brothers fought for the last time together against their unwearied foes. Large reinforcements, "an innumerable summer army," as Ethelward calls them, had come to the Danish head-quarters at Reading in the last few weeks. They had now regained their old superiority in numbers, and fought again in two divisions. Through the greater part of the day the Saxons had the better, but towards evening fortune changed, and at last, after great loss on both sides, the Pagan "had possession of the place of death." Edmund, the new bishop of Sherborne, successor to the gallant Ealstan, was here slain, and Ethelred himself is said to have been mortally wounded. At any rate he died almost immediately after the battle, and was buried by Alfred, with kingly honours, in Wimborne Minster. Sherborne, the burial-place of the family of Cerdic, had for the moment no bishop, was closed perhaps, may even have been in pagan hands. And thus, at the age of twenty-three, Alfred ascended the throne of his fathers, which was tottering as it seemed to its fall.

CHAPTER VII.

ALFRED ON THE THRONE.

"O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king; and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or to come in."

THE throne of the West Saxons was not an inheritance to be desired in the year 871, when Alfred succeeded his gallant brother. It descended on him without comment or ceremony, as a matter of course. There was not even an assembly of the witan to declare the succession, as in ordinary times. With Guthrum and Hinguar in their entrenched camp at the confluence of the Thames and Kennet, and fresh bands of marauders sailing up the former river, and constantly swelling the ranks of the pagan army during these summer months, there was neither time nor heart amongst the wise men of the West Saxons for strict adherence to the letter of the constitution, however venerable. We have seen, too, that the succession had already been settled by the Great Council, when they formally accepted the provisions of Ethelwulf's will, that his three sons should succeed to the exclusion of the children of any one of them.

The idea of strict hereditary succession has taken so strong a hold of us English in later times, that it is necessary constantly to insist that our old English kingship was elective. Alfred's title was based on election; and so little was the idea of usurpation, or of any wrong done to the two infant sons of Ethelred, connected with his accession, that even the lineal descendant of one of those sons, in his chronicle of that eventful year, does not pause to notice the fact that Ethelred left children. He is writing to his "beloved cousin Matilda," to instruct her in the things which he had received from ancient traditions, "of the history of our race down to these two kings from whom we have our origin." "The fourth son of Ethelwulf," he writes, "was Ethelred, who, after the death of Ethelbert, succeeded to the kingdom, and was also my grandfather's grandfather. The fifth was Alfred, who succeeded after all the others to the whole sovereignty, and was your grandfather's grandfather." And so passes on to the next facts, without a word as to the claims of his own lineal ancestor, though he had paused in his narrative at this point for the special purpose of introducing a little family episode.

This king has indeed been anointed by the Pope, named by his royal father and brother, and elected by his people; may not we add, taking Mr. Carlyle's test, that he had been also elected for them in heaven? If it will not hold in his case, we must indeed throw up this idea of election altogether, and allow that Heaven has nothing to say to the business.

But we who value our England as we have it will not just now dispute about where or how Alfred got elected, or from whence the right came to him to stand forth in this dark hour, a shepherd who will give his life for the sheep, a monarch who has to tread the winepress alone. Enough for us that he, and no other, was found there; and so, that we have our own country, and not another kind of country altogether in which to live.

When Alfred had buried his brother in the cloisters of Wimborne Minster, and had time to look out from his Dorsetshire resting-place, and take stock of the immediate prospects and work which lay before him, we can well believe that those historians are right who have told us that for the moment he lost heart and hope, and suffered himself to doubt whether God would by his hand deliver the afflicted nation from its terrible straits. In the eight pitched battles which we find by the Saxon Chronicle (Asser giving seven only) had already been fought with the pagan army, the flower of the youth of these parts of the West Saxon kingdom must have fallen. The other Teutonic kingdoms of the island, of which he was overlord, and so bound to defend, had ceased to exist except in name, or lay utterly powerless, like Mercia, awaiting their doom. Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, which were now an integral part of the royal inheritance of his own family, were at the mercy of his enemies, and he without a hope of striking a blow for them. London had been pillaged, and was in ruins. Even in Wessex proper, Berkshire and Hampshire,

with parts of Wilts and Dorset, had been crossed and recrossed by marauding bands, in whose track only smoking ruins and dead bodies were found. "The land was as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness." These bands were at this very moment on foot, striking into new districts further to the south-west than they had yet reached. If the rich lands of Somersetshire and Devonshire, and the yet unplundered parts of Wilts and Dorset, are to be saved, it must be by prompt and decisive fighting, and it is time for a king to be in the field. But it is a month from his brother's death before Alfred can gather men enough round his standard to take the field openly. Even then, when he fights, it is "almost against his will," for his ranks are sadly thin, and the whole pagan army are before him, at Wilton near Salisbury. The action would seem to have been brought on by the impetuosity of Alfred's own men, whose spirit was still unbroken, and their confidence in their young king enthusiastic. There was a long and fierce fight as usual, during the earlier part of which the Saxons had the advantage, though greatly outnumbered. But again we get glimpses of the old trap of a feigned flight and ambuscade, into which they fell, and so again lose "possession of the place of death," the ultimate test of victory. "This year," says the Saxon Chronicle, "nine general battles were fought against the army in the kingdom south of the Thames; besides which, Alfred the king's brother, and single aldermen and king's thanes, oftentimes made attacks on them, which

were not counted; and within the year one king and nine jarls were slain." Wilton was the last of these general actions, and not long afterwards, probably in the autumn, Alfred made peace with the Pagans, on condition that they should quit Wessex at once. They were probably allowed to carry off whatever spoils they may have been able to accumulate in their Reading camp, but I can find no authority for believing that Alfred fell into the fatal and humiliating mistake of either paying them anything, or giving hostages, or promising tribute. There are constant notices of such payments in the chroniclers when any such were actually made, as, for instance, in the case of Mercia in the following year; so, in the absence of positive affirmative evidence, I am not prepared to believe that Guthrum and his swarm of pirates were bought out of Wessex by Alfred in the first year of his reign. It seems far more likely that they had had more desperate fighting, and less plunder, than suited them in those eight or nine months since they broke up their winter quarters at Thetford, and were glad of peace for the present. This young king, who, as crown prince, led the West Saxons up the slopes at Ashdown, when Bagsac, the two Sidrocs, and the rest were killed, and who has very much their own way of fighting—going into the clash of arms, "when the hard steel rings upon the high helmets," and "the beasts of prey have ample spoil," like a veritable child of Odin—is clearly one whom it is best to let alone, at any rate so long as easy plunder and rich lands are to be found elsewhere, without such

poison-mad fighting for every herd of cattle, and rood of ground. Indeed I think the careful reader may trace from the date of Ashdown a decided unwillingness on the part of the Danes to meet Alfred, except when they could catch him at disastrous odds. They succeeded indeed for a time in overrunning almost the whole of his kingdom, in driving him an exile for a few wretched weeks to the shelter of his own forests; but whenever he was once fairly in the field, they preferred taking refuge in strong places, and offering treaties and hostages, to the actual arbitrament of battle.

So the pagan army quitted Reading, and wintered in 872 in the neighbourhood of London, at which place they receive proposals from Buhred, king of the Mercians, Alfred's brother-in-law, and for a money payment pass him and his people contemptuously by for the time, making some kind of treaty of peace with them, and go northward into what has now become their own country. They winter in Lincolnshire, gathering fresh strength during 873 from the never-failing sources of supply across the narrow seas. Again, however, in this year of ominous rest they renew their sham peace with poor Buhred and his Mercians, who thus manage to tide it over another winter. In 874, however, their time has come. In the spring, the pagan army under the three kings, Guthrum, Oskytal, and Amund, burst into Mercia. In this one only of the English Teutonic kingdoms they find neither fighting nor suffering hero to cross their way, and leave behind for a thousand years the memory of a

noble end, cut out there in some half-dozen lines of an old chronicler, but full of life and inspiration to this day for all Englishmen. Here we have neither a pious Algar, or lay brother Toly, calmly taking their last sacrament at sunbreak, within hearing of the pagan rites over their fallen king; nor Alderman Ethelwulf with his faith in the captaincy of Christ; nor King Edmund, "gentle landlord," and slow in battle, but with the constancy that can brave all torture, if the will of God be so; still less a king who carries the Psalms of David in his bosom under his armour, and will fight nine pitched battles in a year, whose presence lifts the hearts of men, and nerves their arms till they cease to reckon odds. With no man to lead them, what can these poor Mercians do? The whole country is overrun, and reduced under pagan rule without a blow struck, so far as we know, and within the year. This poor Buhred, titular king of the Mercians, who has made belief to rule this English kingdom these twenty-two years—who in his time has marched with his father-in-law Ethelwulf across North Wales—has beleaguered Nottingham with his brothers-in-law, Ethelred and Alfred, six years back, not without show of manhood—sees for his part nothing for it under such circumstances but to get away as swiftly as possible, as many so-called kings have done before him and since. The West Saxon court is no place for him, quite other views of kingship prevailing in those parts. So the poor Buhred breaks away from his anchors, leaving his wife Ethelswitha even, in his haste, to take refuge

with her brother; or is it that the heart of the daughter of the race of Cerdic swells against leaving the land which her sires had won, the people they had planted there, in the moment of sorest need? In any case Buhred drifts away alone across into France, and so towards the winter to Rome. There he dies at once, about Christmas time 874, of shame and sorrow probably, or of a broken heart as we say; at any rate having this kingly gift left in him, that he cannot live and look on the ruin of his people, as St. Edmund's brother Edwold is doing in these same years, "near a clear well at Carnelia, in Dorsetshire," doing the hermit business there on bread and water.

The English in Rome bury away poor Buhred, with all the honours, in the church of St. Mary's, to which the English schools rebuilt by his father-in-law Ethelwulf were attached. Ethelswitha visited, or started to visit, the tomb years later, we are told, in 888, when Mercia had risen to new life under her great brother's rule. Through these same months Guthrum, Oskytal, and the rest, are wintering at Repton, after destroying there the cloister where the kingly line of Mercia lie; disturbing perhaps the bones of the great Offa, whom Charlemagne had to treat as an equal.

Neither of the pagan kings are inclined at this time to settle in Mercia; so, casting about what to do with it, they light on "a certain foolish man," a king's thane, one Ceolwulf, and set him up as a sort of King Popinjay. From this Ceolwulf they take hostages for the payment of yearly tribute

(to be wrung out of these poor Mercians on pain of dethronement), and for the surrender of the kingdom to them on whatever day they would have it back again. Foolish king's thanes, turned into King Popinjays by Pagans, and left to play at government on such terms, are not pleasant or profitable objects in such times as these of 1,000 years since—or indeed in any times for the matter of that. So let us finish with Ceolwulf, just noting that a year or two later his pagan lords seem to have found much of the spoil of monasteries, and the pickings of earl and churl, of folkland and bookland, sticking to his fingers, instead of finding its way to their coffers. This was far from their meaning in setting him up in the high places of Mercia. So they just strip him, and thrust him out, and he dies in beggary.

This then is the winter's work of the great pagan army at Repton, Alfred watching them and their work doubtless with keen eye—not without misgivings too at their numbers, swollen again to terrible proportions since they sailed away down Thames after Wilton fight. It will take years yet before the gaps in the fighting strength of Wessex, left by those nine pitched battles, and other smaller fights, will be filled by the crop of youths passing from childhood to manhood. An anxious thought that for a young king.

The Pagans, however, are not yet ready for another throw for Wessex; and so when Mercia is sucked dry for the present, and will no longer suitably maintain so great a host, they again sever. Halfdene, who

would seem to have joined them recently, takes a large part of the army away with him northwards. Settling his head-quarters by the river Tyne, he subdues all the land, and "ofttimes spoils the Picts and the Strathclyde Britons." Amongst other holy places in those parts, Halfdene visits the Isle of Lindisfarne, hoping perhaps in his pagan soul not only to commit ordinary sacrilege in the holy places there, which is every-day work for the like of him, but even to lay impious hands on, and to treat with indignity, the remains of that holy man, St. Cuthbert, of whom we have already heard, and who has become in due course patron and guardian saint of hunters, and of that scourge of Pagans, Alfred the West Saxon. If such were his thought, he is disappointed of his sacrilege; for Bishop Eardulf and Abbot Eadred—devout and strenuous persons—having timely warning of his approach, carry away the sainted body from Lindisfarne, and for nine years hide with it up and down the distracted northern counties, now here, now there, moving that sacred treasure from place to place until this bitterness is overpast, and holy persons and things, dead or living, are no longer in danger, and the bodies of saints may rest safely in fixed shrines; the pagan armies and disorderly persons of all kinds having been converted, or suppressed, in the meantime. For which good deed, the royal Alfred (in whose calendar St. Cuthbert, patron of huntsmen, stands very high) will surely warmly befriend them hereafter, when he has settled his accounts with many persons and things. From the time of this incursion

of Halfdene, Northumbria may be considered once more a settled state; but a Danish, not a Saxon one.

The rest and greater part of the army, under Guthrum, Oskytal, and Amund, on leaving Repton, strike south-east, through what was Landlord Edmund's country, to Cambridge, where, in their usual heathen way, they pass the winter of 875.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND WAVE.

THE downfall, exile, and death of his brother-in-law in 874 must have warned Alfred, if he had any need of warning, that no treaty could bind these foemen, and that he had nothing to look for but the same measure as soon as the pagan leaders felt themselves strong enough to mete it out to him and Wessex. In the following year we accordingly find him on the alert, and taking action in a new direction. These heathen pirates, he sees, fight his people at terrible advantage by reason of their command of the sea. This enables them to choose their own point of attack, not only along the sea-coast, but up every river as far as their light galleys can swim ; to retreat unmolested, at their own time, whenever the fortune of war turns against them ; to bring reinforcements of men and supplies to the scene of action without fear of hindrance. His Saxons have long since given up their seafaring habits. They have become before all things an agricultural people, drawing almost everything they need from their own soil. The few foreign tastes they have are supplied by foreign traders. However, if Wessex is to be made safe, the sea-

kings must be met on their own element; and so, with what expenditure of patience and money, and encouraging words and example we may easily conjecture, the young king gets together a small fleet, and himself takes command of it. We have no clue to the point on the south coast where the admiral of twenty-five fights his first naval action, but know only that in the summer of 875 he is cruising with his fleet, and meets seven tall ships of the enemy. One of these he captures, and the rest make off after a hard fight—no small encouragement to the sailor king, who has thus for another year saved Saxon homesteads from devastation by fire and sword.

The second wave of invasion had now at last gathered weight and volume enough, and broke on the king and people of the West Saxons. The year 876 was still young when the whole pagan army, which had wintered at and about Cambridge, marched to their ships, and put to sea. Guthrum was in command, with the other two kings, Anketel and Amund, as his lieutenants, under whom was a host as formidable as that which had marched across Mercia through forest and waste, and sailed up the Thames five years before, to the assault of Reading. There must have been some few days of harassing suspense, for we cannot suppose that Alfred was not aware of the movements of his terrible foes. Probably his new fleet cruised off the south coast on the watch for them, and all up the Thames there were gloomy watchings, and forebodings of a repetition of the evil days of 871. But the suspense was soon over. Passing

by the Thames' mouth, and through Dover Straits, the pagan fleet sailed, and westward still past many tempting harbours and rivers' mouths, until they came off the coast of Dorsetshire. There they land at Wareham, and seize and fortify the neck of land between the rivers Frome and Piddle, on which stood, when they landed, a fortress of the West Saxons and a monastery of holy virgins. Fortress and monastery fell into the hands of the Danes, who set to work at once to throw up earthworks and otherwise fortify a space large enough to contain their army, and all spoil brought in by marauding bands from this hitherto unplundered country. This fortified camp was soon very strong, except on the western side, upon which Alfred shortly appeared with a body of horsemen, and such other troops as could be gathered hastily together. The detachments of the Pagans, who were already out pillaging the whole neighbourhood, fell back apparently before him, concentrating on the Wareham camp. Before its outworks Alfred paused. He is too experienced a soldier now to risk at the outset of a campaign such a disaster as that which he and Ethelred had sustained in their attempt to assault the camp at Reading in 871. He is just strong enough to keep the Pagans within their lines, but has no margin to spare. So he sits down before the camp, but no battle is fought, neither he nor Guthrum caring to bring matters to that issue. Soon negotiations are commenced, and again a treaty is made.

On this occasion Alfred would seem to have taken

special pains to bind his faithless foe. All the holy relics which could be procured from holy places in the neighbourhood were brought together, that he himself and his people might set the example of pledging themselves in the most solemn manner known to Christian men. Then a holy ring or bracelet, smeared with the blood of beasts sacrificed to Woden, was placed on a heathen altar. Upon this Guthrum and his fellow kings and earls swore on behalf of the army that they would quit the King's country and give hostages. Such an oath had never been sworn by Danish leader on English soil before. It was the most solemn known to them. They would seem also to have sworn on Alfred's relics, as an extra proof of their sincerity for this once, and their hostages "from amongst the most renowned men in the army" were duly handed over. Alfred now relaxed his watch, even if he did not withdraw with the main body of his army, leaving his horse to see that the terms of the treaty were performed, and to watch the Wareham camp until the departure of the pagan host. But neither oath on sacred ring, nor the risk to their hostages, weighed with Guthrum and his followers when any advantage was to be gained by treachery. They steal out of the camp by night, surprise and murder the Saxon horsemen, seize the horses, and strike across the country, the mounted men leading, to Exeter, but leaving a sufficient garrison to hold Wareham for the present. They surprise and get possession of the western capital, and there settle down to pass the winter.

Rollo, fiercest of the vikings, is said by Asser to have passed the winter with them in their Exeter quarters on his way to Normandy; but whether the great robber himself were here or not, it is certain that the channel swarmed with pirate fleets, who could put in to Wareham or Exeter at their discretion, and find a safe stronghold in either place from which to carry fire and sword through the unhappy country.

Alfred had vainly endeavoured to overtake the march to Exeter in the autumn of 876, and failing in the pursuit, had disbanded his own troops as usual, allowing them to go to their homes until the spring. Before he could be afoot again in the spring of 877 the main body of the Pagans at Exeter had made that city too strong for any attempt at assault, so the King and his troops could do no more than beleaguer it on the land side, as he had done at Wareham. But Guthrum could laugh at all efforts of his great antagonist, and wait in confidence the sure disbanding of the Saxon troops at harvest-time, so long as his ships held the sea.

Supplies were soon running short in Exeter, but the Exe was open, and communications going on with Wareham. It is arranged that the camp there shall be broken up, and the whole garrison with their spoil shall join head-quarters. 120 Danish war-galleys are freighted, and beat down channel, but are baffled by adverse winds for nearly a month. They and all their supplies may be looked for any day in the Exe when the wind changes. Alfred, from his camp before Exeter, sends to his little fleet to put to sea. He cannot him-

self be with them as in their first action, for he knows well that Guthrum will seize the first moment of his absence to sally from Exeter, break the Saxon lines, and scatter his army in roving bands over Devonshire, on their way back to the eastern kingdom. The Saxon fleet puts out, manned itself, as some say, partly with sea-robbers, hired to fight their own people. However manned, it attacks bravely a portion of the pirates. But a mightier power than the fleet fought for Alfred at this crisis. First a dense fog, and then a great storm came on, bursting on the south coast with such fury that the Pagans lost no less than 100 of their chief ships off Swanage; as mighty a deliverance perhaps for England—though the memory of it is nearly forgotten—as that which began in the same seas 700 years later, when Drake and the sea-kings of the 16th century were hanging on the rear of the Spanish Armada along the Devon and Dorset coasts, while the beacons blazed up all over England, and the whole nation flew to arms.

The destruction of the fleet decided the fate of the siege of Exeter. Once more negotiations are opened by the Pagans; once more Alfred, fearful of driving them to extremities, listens, treats, and finally accepts oaths and more hostages, acknowledging probably in sorrow to himself that he can for the moment do no better. And on this occasion Guthrum, being caught far from home, and without supplies or ships, "keeps the peace well," moving as we conjecture, watched jealously by Alfred, on the shortest line across Devon and Somerset to some ford in the Avon, and so across

into Mercia, where he arrives during harvest, and billets his army on Ceolwulf, camping them for the winter about the city of Gloster. Here they run up huts for themselves, and make some pretence of permanent settlement on the Severn, dividing large tracts of land amongst those who cared to take them.

The campaigns of 876-7 are generally looked upon as disastrous ones for the Saxon arms, but this view is certainly not supported by the chroniclers. It is true that both at Wareham and Exeter the Pagans broke new ground, and secured their positions, from which no doubt they did sore damage in the neighbouring districts; but we can trace in these years none of the old ostentatious daring, and thirst for battle with Alfred. Whenever he appears the pirate bands draw back at once into their strongholds, and, exhausted as great part of Wessex must have been by the constant strain, the West Saxons show no signs yet of falling from their gallant king. If he can no longer collect in a week such an army as fought at Ashdown, he can still, without much delay, bring to his side a sufficient force to hem the Pagans in and keep them behind their ramparts.

But the nature of the service was telling sadly on the resources of the kingdom south of the Thames. To the Saxons there came no new levies, while from the north and east of England, as well as from over the sea, Guthrum was ever drawing to his standard wandering bands of sturdy Northmen. The most important of these reinforcements came to him from an unexpected quarter this autumn. We have not

heard for some years of Hubba, the brother of Hinguar, the younger of the two vikings who planned and led the first great invasion in 868. Perhaps he may have resented the arrival of Guthrum and other kings in the following years, to whom he had to give place. Whatever may have been the cause, he seems to have gone off on his own account, carrying with him the famous raven standard, to do his appointed work in these years on other coasts under its ominous shade.

This "war-flag which they call raven" was a sacred object to the Northmen. When Hinguar and Hubba had heard of the death of their father, Regner Lodbrog, and had resolved to avenge him, while they were calling together their followers, their three sisters in one day wove for them this war-flag, in the midst of which was portrayed the figure of a raven. Whenever the flag went before them into battle, if they were to win the day the sacred raven would rouse itself and stretch its wings, but if defeat awaited them the flag would hang round its staff, and the bird remain motionless. This wonder had been proved in many a fight, so the wild Pagans who fought under the standard of Regner's children believed. It was a power in itself, and Hubba and a strong fleet were with it.

They had appeared in the Bristol Channel in this autumn of 877, and had ruthlessly slaughtered and spoiled the people of South Wales. Here they propose to winter; but, as the country is wild mountain for the most part, and the people very poor, they will remain no longer than they can help. Already a large part of the army about Gloster are getting restless. The

story of their march from Devonshire, through rich districts of Wessex yet unplundered, goes round amongst the new-comers. Guthrum has no power, probably no will, to keep them to their oaths. In the early winter a joint attack is planned by him and Hubba on the West Saxon territory. By Christmas they are strong enough to take the field, and so in mid-winter, shortly after Twelfth-night, the camp at Gloster breaks up, and the army "stole away to Chippenham," recrossing the Avon once more into Wessex, under Guthrum. The fleet, after a short delay, cross to the Devonshire coast, under Hubba, in thirty war-ships.

And now at last the courage of the West Saxons gives way. The surprise is complete. Wiltshire is at the mercy of the Pagans, who, occupying the royal burgh of Chippenham as head-quarters, overrun the whole district, drive many of the inhabitants "beyond the sea for want of the necessaries of life," and reduce to subjection all those that remain. Alfred is at his post, but for the moment can make no head against them. His own strong heart and trust in God are left him, and with them and a scanty band of followers he disappears into the forest of Selwood, which then stretched away from the confines of Wiltshire for thirty miles to the west. East Somerset, now one of the fairest and richest of English counties, was then for the most part thick wood and tangled swamp, but miserable as the lodging is it is welcome for the time to the King. In the first months of 878, Selwood Forest holds in its recesses the hope of England.

CHAPTER IX.

ATHELNEY.

"*Behold a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*"

AT first sight it seems hard to account for the sudden and complete collapse of the West Saxon power in January 878. In the campaign of the last year Alfred had been successful on the whole, both by sea and land. He had cleared the soil of Wessex from the enemy, and had reduced the pagan leaders to sue humbly for terms, and to give whatever hostages he demanded. Yet three months later the simple crossing the Avon and taking of Chippenham is enough, if we can believe the chroniclers, to paralyse the whole kingdom, and to leave Alfred a fugitive, hiding in Selwood Forest, with a mere handful of followers and his own family. But there is no doubt or discrepancy in the accounts. The Saxon Chronicle says, in its short clear style, that the army stole away to Chippenham during mid-winter, after Twelfth-night, and sat down there; "and many of the people they drove beyond the sea, and of the rest the greater part

they subdued and forced to obey them, except King Alfred; and he with a small band with difficulty retreated to the woods and the fastnesses of the moors." Asser and the rest merely expand this statement in one form or another, leaving the main facts—the complete success of the blow, and the inability of Alfred at the moment to ward it off, or return it, or recover from it—altogether unquestioned.

Some writers have thought to account for it by transposing a passage from Brompton, narrating obscurely a battle at Chippenham, and another at a place called Abendune, in both of which Alfred is defeated. This occurs in Brompton in the year 871, and, being clearly out of place there, has been seized on to help out the difficulty in the year 878.

But there does not appear to be the least ground for taking this liberty with Brompton's text, nor even, if there were, is he a sufficiently sound authority to rely upon for any fact which is not to be found in the Saxon Chronicle, or Asser. Nor indeed is there need of any such explanation when the facts come to be carefully examined.

In the first place, this winter inroad on Chippenham was made at a time of year when even the vikings and their followers were usually at rest. Guthrum and his host fell upon the Wiltshire and Somersetshire men when they were quite unprepared, and before they had had time to hide away their wives and children or any provision of corn or beasts. Then the country was already exhausted. The Pagans, it is true, had not yet visited this part of Wessex, but the

23276

drain of men must have been felt here, in the last eight years, as well as further east and south. We remark, too, that these West Saxons are the nearest neighbours of the Mercians, amongst whom a considerable body of the Danes had been now settled for some years. Paganism was rife again at Gloster, and no great harm seemed to come of it. These pagan settlers, though insolent and overbearing, still lived side by side with the Saxon inhabitants; did not attempt to drive them out or exterminate them; left them some portion of their worldly goods. On the other hand, what hope is there in fighting against a foe who has nothing to lose but his life, whose numbers are inexhaustible. Might it not be better to make any terms with them, such, for instance, as our Mercian brethren have made? This young king of ours cannot protect us, has spent all his treasure in former wars, has little indeed left but his name. Who is Alfred? and what is the race of Cerdic? Know ye not that we are consumed?

Here, for the first time, in 878, we find traces of this kind of demoralization and of disloyalty to their king and land on the part of a portion of his people; and the strong and patient soul of Alfred must have been wrung by an anguish such as he had not yet known, as he heard from his hiding-place of this apostasy. Here then our great king touches the lowest point in his history. So far as outward circumstances go, humiliation can indeed hardly go further than this. Are we to believe the story that he had earned and prepared that humiliation for himself in

those first few years of his reign between the autumn of 872, when the camp at Reading broke up, and the early spring of 876, when the pagan fleet appeared off Wareham? The form in which this story comes down to us is in itself suspicious. It rests mainly on the authority of the "Life of St. Neot," a work of the next century, the author of which is not known; but only thus much about him, that he was a monk bent on exalting the character and history of his saint, without much care at whose expense this was to be done. The passage in Asser, apparently confirming the statement, is regarded by all the best scholars as spurious, and indeed commences with a reference to the "Life of St. Neot," so that it could not possibly be of the same date as the rest of Asser's book, which was written during the King's lifetime. "The Almighty," so the anonymous author writes, "not only granted to this glorious king victories over his enemies, but also allowed him to be harassed by them, and weighed down by misfortunes and by the low estate of his followers, to the end that he might learn that there is one Lord of all things to whom every knee must bow, and in whose hand are the hearts of kings; who puts down the mighty from their seat, and exalts them of low degree; who suffers His servants, when they are at the height of good fortune, to be touched by the rod of adversity, that in their humility they may not despair of God's mercy, and in their prosperity may not boast of their honours, but may also know to whom they owe all they have. One may therefore believe that these misfortunes were

brought on the King because in the beginning of his reign, when he was a youth and swayed by a youth's impulses, he would not listen to the petitions which his subjects made to him for help in their necessities, or for relief from their oppressors, but used to drive them from him and pay no heed to their requests. This conduct gave much pain to the holy man St. Neot, who was his relation, and often foretold to him in the spirit of prophecy that he would suffer great adversity on this account. But Alfred neither attended to the proof of the man of God, nor listened to his soothsaying. Wherefore, seeing that a man's sins must be punished, either in this world or the next, the true and righteous Judge willed that his sin should not go unpunished in this world, to the end that He might spare him in the world to come. For this cause, therefore, King Alfred often fell into such great misery that sometimes none of his subjects knew where he was or what had become of him."

So writes the monkish historian, upon whose statement one remarks, that in the only place where it can be tested it is not accurate. The one occasion on which Alfred fell into such misery that his subjects did not know where he was, was in this January of 878. We know that for many years before his accession he was anxiously bent on acquiring knowledge, and in disciplining himself for his work in life, whatever it might be. Patience, humility, and utter forgetfulness of self, the true royal qualities, shine out through every word and act of his life wherever we can get at them. Indeed, I think no one can be

familiar with the authentic records of his words and works and believe that he could ever have alienated his people by arrogance, or impatience, or superciliousness. His would seem to be rather one of those rare natures which march through life without haste and without faltering; bearing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, but never resting before the evil which is going on all round him, and of which he is conscious in his own soul. He may indeed have alienated some nobles and official persons in his kingdom, by curbing vigorously, and at once, the powers of the aldermen and reeves. Indeed, it is said, that in one of those years he hanged as many as forty-four reeves for unjust judgments, even for stretching the King's prerogative against suitors. No doubt, also, his demands on the people generally for military service, the building of ships, and restoring of fortified places, were burdensome, and may have caused some discontent. But there is no trustworthy evidence, that I have been able to find, of any disaffection, nor does it need the suggestion of any such cause to account for the events of the winter of 878.

So much then for the monkish tradition of Alfred's arrogant youth and its results. It cannot be passed over, but must be read by the light of his later life and work, as we have it in minute detail.

The King then disappears in January 878 from the eyes of Saxon and Northmen, and we must follow him, by such light as tradition throws upon these months, into the thickets and marshes of Selwood. It

is at this point, as is natural enough, that romance has been most busy, and it has become impossible to disentangle the actual facts from monkish legend and Saxon ballad. In happier times Alfred was in the habit himself of talking over the events of his wandering life pleasantly with his courtiers, and there is no reason to doubt that the foundation of most of the stories still current rests on those conversations of the truth-loving King, noted down by Bishop Asser and others.

The best known of these is, of course, the story of the cakes. In the depths of the Saxon forests there were always a few neat-herds and swine-herds, scattered up and down, living in rough huts enough, we may be sure, and occupied with the care of the cattle and herds of their masters. Amongst these in Selwood was a neat-herd of the King, a faithful man, to whom the secret of Alfred's disguise was entrusted, and who kept it even from his wife. To this man's hut the King came one day alone, and, sitting himself down by the burning logs on the hearth, began mending his bow and arrows. The neat-herd's wife had just finished her baking, and having other household matters to attend to, confided her loaves to the King, a poor tired-looking body, who might be glad of the warmth, and could make himself useful by turning the batch, and so earn his share while she got on with other business. But Alfred worked away at his weapons, thinking of anything but the good housewife's batch of loaves, which in due course were not only done, but rapidly burning to a cinder. At

this moment the neat-herd's wife comes back, and flying to the hearth to rescue the bread, cries out, "D'rat the man! never to turn the loaves when you see them burning. I'ze warrant you ready enough to eat them when they're done." But besides the King's faithful neat-herd, whose name is not preserved, there are other churls in the forest, who must be Alfred's comrades just now if he will have any. And even here he has an eye for a good man, and will lose no opportunity to help one to the best of his power. Such an one he finds in a certain swine-herd called Denewulf, whom he gets to know, a thoughtful Saxon man, minding his charge there in the oak woods. The rough churl, or thrall, we know not which, has great capacity, as Alfred soon finds out, and desire to learn. So the King goes to work upon Denewulf under the oak trees, when the swine will let him, and is well satisfied with the results of his teaching and the progress of his pupil, as will appear in the sequel.

But in those miserable days the commonest necessaries of life were hard enough to come by for the King and his few companions, and for his wife and family, who soon joined him in the forest, even if they were not with him from the first. The poor foresters cannot maintain them, nor are this band of exiles the men to live on the poor. So Alfred and his comrades are soon out foraging on the borders of the forest, and getting what subsistence they can from the Pagans, or from the Christians who had submitted to their yoke. So we may

imagine them dragging on life till near Easter, when a gleam of good news comes up from the west, to gladden the hearts, and strengthen the arms, of these poor men in the depths of Selwood.

Soon after Guthrum and the main body of the Pagans moved from Gloster, southwards, the Viking Hubba, as had been agreed, sailed with thirty ships of war from his winter quarters on the South Welsh coast, and landed in Devon. The news of the catastrophe at Chippenham, and of the disappearance of the King, was no doubt already known in the west; and in the face of it Odda the alderman cannot gather strength to meet the Pagan in the open field. But he is a brave and true man, and will make no terms with the spoilers; so, with other faithful thegns of King Alfred and their followers, he throws himself into a castle or fort called Cynwith, or Cynnit, there to abide whatever issue of this business God shall send them. Hubba, with the war-flag Raven, and a host laden with the spoil of rich Devon vales, appear in due course before the place. It is not strong naturally, and has only "walls in our own fashion," meaning probably rough earthworks. But there are resolute men behind them, and on the whole Hubba declines the assault, and sits down before the place. There is no spring of water, he hears, within the Saxon lines, and they are otherwise wholly unprepared for a siege. A few days will no doubt settle the matter, and the sword or slavery will be the portion of Odda and the rest of Alfred's men; meantime there is spoil enough in the camp

from Devonshire homesteads, which brave men can revel in round the war-flag Raven, while they watch the Saxon ramparts. Odda, however, has quite other views than death from thirst, or surrender. Before any stress comes, early one morning, he and his whole force sally out over their earthworks, and from the first "cut down the pagans in great numbers:" 840 warriors (some say 1,200), with Hubba himself, are slain before Cynnit fort; the rest, few in number, escape to their ships. The war-flag Raven is left in the hands of Odda and the men of Devon.

This is the news which comes to Alfred, Ethelnoth the alderman of Somerset, Denewulf the swine-herd, and the rest of the Selwood Forest group, some time before Easter. These men of Devonshire, it seems, are still staunch, and ready to peril their lives against the pagan. No doubt up and down Wessex, thrashed and trodden out as the nation is by this time, there are other good men and true, who will neither cross the sea, or the Welsh marches, or make terms with the Pagan; some sprinkling of men who will yet set life at stake, for faith in Christ and love of England. If these can only be rallied, who can say what may follow? So, in the lengthening days of spring, council is held in Selwood, and there will have been Easter services in some chapel, or hermitage, in the forest, or, at any rate, in some quiet glade. The "day of days" will surely have had its voice of hope for this poor remnant. Christ is risen and reigns; and it is not in these heathen Danes, or in all the Northmen who ever sailed across

the sea, to put back His kingdom, or enslave those whom He has freed.

The result is, that, far away from the eastern boundary of the forest, on a rising ground—hill it can scarcely be called—surrounded by dangerous marshes formed by the little rivers Thone and Parret, fordable only in summer, and even then dangerous to all who have not the secret, a small fortified camp is thrown up under Alfred's eye, by Ethelnoth and the Somersetshire men, where he can once again raise his standard. The spot has been chosen by the King with the utmost care, for it is his last throw! He names it the Etheling's eig or island, "Athelney." Probably his young son, the Etheling of England, is there amongst the first, with his mother and his grandmother Eadburgha, the widow of Ethelred Mucil, the venerable lady whom Asser saw in later years, and who has now no country but her daughter's. There are, as has been reckoned, some two acres of hard ground on the island, and around vast brakes of alder-bush, full of deer and other game.

Here the Somersetshire men can keep up constant communication with him, and a small army grows together. They are soon strong enough to make forays into the open country, and in many skirmishes they cut off parties of the Pagans, and supplies. "For, even when overthrown and cast down," says Malmesbury, "Alfred had always to be fought with; so then, when one would esteem him altogether worn down and broken, like a snake slipping from the hand of him who would grasp it, he would suddenly

flash out again from his hiding-places, rising up to smite his foes in the height of their insolent confidence, and never more hard to beat than after a flight."

But it was still a trying life at Athelney. Followers came in slowly, and provender and supplies of all kinds are hard to wring from the Pagan, and harder still to take from Christian men. One day, while it was yet so cold that the water was still frozen, the King's people had gone out "to get them fish or fowl, or some such purveyance as they sustained themselves withal." No one was left in the royal hut for the moment but himself, and his mother-in-law Eadburgha. The King (after his constant wont whensoever he had opportunity) was reading from the Psalms of David, out of the Manual which he carried always in his bosom. At this moment a poor man appeared at the door and begged for a morsel of bread "for Christ His sake." Whereupon the King, receiving the stranger as a brother, called to his mother-in-law to give him to eat. Eadburgha replied that there was but one loaf in their store, and a little wine in a pitcher, a provision wholly insufficient for his own family and people. But the King bade her nevertheless to give the stranger part of the last loaf, which she accordingly did. But when he had been served the stranger was no more seen, and the loaf remained whole, and the pitcher full to the brim. Alfred, meantime, had turned to his reading, over which he fell asleep, and dreamt that St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne stood by him, and told him it was he who had been his guest, and that God had seen his

afflictions and those of his people, which were now about to end, in token whereof his people would return that day from their expedition with a great take of fish. The King awaking, and being much impressed with his dream, called to his mother-in-law and recounted it to her, who thereupon assured him that she too had been overcome with sleep, and had had the same dream. And while they yet talked together on what had happened so strangely to them, their servants come in, bringing fish enough, as it seemed to them, to have fed an army.

The monkish legend goes on to tell that on the next morning the King crossed to the mainland in a boat, and wound his horn thrice, which drew to him before noon 500 men. What we may think of the story and the dream, as Sir John Spelman says, "is not here very much material," seeing that whether we deem it natural or supernatural, "the one as well as the other serves at God's appointment, by raising or dejecting of the mind with hopes or fears, to lead man to the resolution of those things whereof He has before ordained the event."

Alfred, we may be sure, was ready to accept and be thankful for any help, let it come from whence it might, and soon after Easter it was becoming clear that the time is at hand for more than skirmishing expeditions. Through all the neighbouring counties word is spreading that their hero king is alive, and on foot again, and that there will be another chance for brave men ere long of meeting once more these scourges of the land, under his leading.

A popular legend is found in the later chroniclers which relates that at this crisis of his fortunes, Alfred, not daring to rely on any evidence but that of his own senses as to the numbers, disposition, and discipline of the pagan army, assumed the garb of a minstrel, and with one attendant visited the camp of Guthrum. Here he stayed, "showing tricks and making sport," until he had penetrated to the King's tents, and learned all that he wished to know. After satisfying himself as to the chances of a sudden attack, he returns to Athelney, and, the time having come for a great effort, if his people will but make it, sends round messengers to the aldermen and king's thegns of neighbouring shires, giving them a tryst for the seventh week after Easter the second week in May.

CHAPTER X.

ETHANDUNE.

"*Unto whom Judas answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few: and with the God of heaven it is all one to deliver with a great multitude or a small company.*

"*For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host, but strength cometh from heaven.*

"*They come against us in much pride and iniquity, to destroy us, and our wives and children, and to spoil us.*

"*But we fight for our lives and our laws.*"

ON or about the 12th of May, 878, King Alfred left his island in the great wood, and his wife and children and such household gods as he had gathered round him there, and came publicly forth amongst his people once more, riding to Egbert's stone (probably Brixton), on the east of Selwood, a distance of 26 miles. Here met him the men of the neighbouring shires—Odda, no doubt, with his men of Devonshire, full of courage and hope after their recent triumph; the men of Somersetshire, under their brave and faithful Alderman Ethelnoth; and the men of Wilts and Hants, such of them at least as had not fled the country or made submission to the enemy. "And when they saw their king alive after such great tribulation, they received him, as he merited, with joy and

acclamation." The gathering had been so carefully planned by Alfred and the nobles who had been in conference or correspondence with him at Athelney, that the Saxon host was organized, and ready for immediate action, on the very day of muster. Whether Alfred had been his own spy we cannot tell, but it is plain that he knew well what was passing in the pagan camp, and how necessary swiftness and secrecy were to the success of his attack.

Local traditions cannot be much relied upon for events which took place a thousand years ago, but where there is clearly nothing improbable in them they are at least worth mentioning. We may note, then, that according to Somersetshire tradition, first collected by Dr. Giles (himself a Somersetshire man, and one who, besides his Life of Alfred and other excellent works bearing on the time, is the author of the "Harmony of the Chroniclers," published by the Alfred Committee in 1852), the signal for the actual gathering of the West Saxons at Egbert's Stone was given by a beacon lighted on the top of Stourton Hill, where Alfred's Tower now stands. Such a beacon would be hidden from the Danes, who must have been encamped about Westbury, by the range of the Wiltshire hills, while it would be visible to the west over the low country towards the Bristol Channel, and to the south far into Dorsetshire.

Not an hour was lost by Alfred at the place of muster. The bands which came together there were composed of men well used to arms, each band under its own alderman, or reeve. The small army he had

himself been disciplining at Athelney, and training in skirmishes during the last few months, would form a reliable centre on which the rest would have to form as best they could. So after one day's halt he breaks up his camp at Egbert's Stone and marches to Æglea, now called Clay Hill, an important height, commanding the vale to the north of Westbury, which the Danish army were now occupying. The day's march of the army would be a short five miles. Here the annals record that St. Neot, his kinsman, appeared to him, and promised that on the morrow his misfortunes would end.

There are still traces of rude earthworks round the top of Clay Hill, which are said to have been thrown up by Alfred's army at this time. If there had been time for such a work, it would undoubtedly have been a wise step, as a fortified encampment here would have served Alfred in good stead in case of a reverse. But the few hours during which the army halted on Clay Hill would have been quite too short time for such an undertaking, which, moreover, would have exhausted the troops. It is more likely that the earthworks, which are of the oldest type, similar to those at White Horse Hill, above Ashdown, were there long before Alfred's arrival in May 878. After resting one night on Clay Hill, Alfred led out his men in close order of battle against the pagan host, which lay at Ethandune. There has been much doubt amongst antiquaries as to the site of Ethandune, but Dr. Giles and others have at length established the claims of Edington, a village seven miles from Clay

Hill, on the north-east to be the spot where the strength of the second wave of pagan invasion was utterly broken, and rolled back weak and helpless from the rock of the West Saxon kingdom,

Sir John Spelman, relying apparently only on the authority of Nicholas Harpesfeld's "Ecclesiastical History of England," puts a speech into Alfred's mouth, which he is supposed to have delivered before the battle of Edington. He tells them that the great sufferings of the land had been yet far short of what their sins had deserved. That God had only dealt with them as a loving Father, and was now about to succour them, having already stricken their foe with fear and astonishment, and given him, on the other hand, much encouragement by dreams and otherwise. That they had to do with pirates and robbers, who had broken faith with them over and over again; and the issue they had to try that day was, whether Christ's faith, or heathenism, was henceforth to be established in England.

There is no trace of any such speech in the Saxon Chronicle or Asser, and the one reported does not ring like that of Judas Maccabeus. That Alfred's soul was on fire that morning, on finding himself once more at the head of a force he could rely on, and before the enemy he had met so often, we may be sure enough, but shall never know how the fire kindled into speech, if indeed it did so at all. In such supreme moments many of the strongest men have no word to say—keep all their heat within.

Nor have we any clue to the numbers who fought

on either side at Ethandune, or indeed in any of Alfred's battles. In the Chronicles there are only a few vague and general statements, from which little can be gathered. The most precise of them is that in the Saxon Chronicle, which gives 840 as the number of men who were slain, as we heard, with Hubba before Cynuit fort, in Devonshire, earlier in this same year. Such a death-roll, in an action in which only a small detachment of the pagan army was engaged, would lead to the conclusion that the armies were far larger than one would expect. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine how any large bodies of men could find subsistence in a small country, which was the seat of so devastating a war, and in which so much land remained still unreclaimed. But whatever the power of either side amounted to we may be quite sure that it had been exerted to the utmost to bring as large a force as possible into line at Ethandune.

Guthrum fought to protect Chippenham, his base of operations, some sixteen miles in his rear, and all the accumulated plunder of the busy months which had passed since Twelfth Night; and it is clear that his men behaved with the most desperate gallantry. The fight began at noon (one chronicler says at sunrise, but the distance makes this impossible unless Alfred marched in the night), and lasted through the greater part of the day. Warned by many previous disasters, the Saxons never broke their close order, and so, though greatly outnumbered, hurled back again and again the onslaughts of the Northmen. At last Alfred and his Saxons prevailed, and smote

his pagan foes with a very great slaughter, and pursued them up to their fortified camp on Bratton Hill or Edge, into which the great body of the fugitives threw themselves. All who were left outside were slain, and the great spoil was all recovered. The camp may still be seen, called Bratton Castle, with its double ditches and deep trenches, and barrow in the midst sixty yards long, and its two entrances guarded by mounds. It contains more than twenty acres, and commands the whole country side. There can be little doubt that this camp, and not Chippenham, which is sixteen miles away, was the last refuge of Guthrum and the great Northern army on Saxon soil.

So, in three days from the breaking up of his little camp at Athelney, Alfred was once more king of all England south of the Thames; for this army of Pagans shut up within their earthworks on Bratton Edge are little better than a broken and disorderly rabble, with no supplies and no chance of succour from any quarter. Nevertheless he will make sure of them, and above all will guard jealously against any such mishap as that of 876, when they stole out of Wareham, murdered the horsemen he had left to watch them, and got away to Exeter. So Bratton Camp is strictly besieged by Alfred with his whole power.

Guthrum, the destroyer, and now the King, of East Anglia, the strongest and ablest of all the Northmen who had ever landed in England, is now at last fairly in Alfred's power. At Reading, Wareham, Exeter,

he had always held a fortified camp, on a river easily navigable by the Danish war-ships, where he might look for speedy succour, or whence at the worst he might hope to escape to the sea. But now he, with the remains of his army, are shut up in an inland fort with no ships on the Avon, the nearest river, even if they could cut their way out and reach it, and no hopes of reinforcements over land. Halfdene is the nearest viking who might be called to the rescue, and he, in Northumbria, is far too distant. It is a matter of a few days only, for food runs short at once in the besieged camp. In former years, or against any other enemy, Guthrum would probably have preferred to sally out, and cut his way through the Saxon lines, or die sword in hand as a son of Odin should. Whether it were that the wild spirit in him is thoroughly broken for the time by the unexpected defeat at Ethandune, or that long residence in a Christian land and contact with Christian subjects have shaken his faith in his own gods, or that he has learnt to measure and appreciate the strength and nobleness of the man he had so often deceived, at any rate for the time Guthrum is subdued. At the end of fourteen days he sends to Alfred, suing humbly for terms of any kind; offering on the part of the army as many hostages as may be required, without asking for any in return; once again giving solemn pledges to quit Wessex for good; and, above all, declaring his own readiness to receive baptism. If it had not been for the last proposal, we may doubt whether even Alfred would have allowed the ruthless foes with whom he and his people

had fought so often, and with such varying success, to escape now. Over and over again they had sworn to him, and broken their oaths the moment it suited their purpose; had given hostages, and left them to their fate. In all English kingdoms they had now for ten years been destroying and pillaging the houses of God, and slaying even women and children. They had driven his sister's husband from the throne of Mercia, and had grievously tortured the martyr Edmund. If ever foe deserved no mercy, Guthrum and his army were the men.

When David smote the children of Moab, he "measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive." When he took Rabbah of the children of Ammon, "he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln." That was the old Hebrew method, even under King David, and in the ninth century Christianity had as yet done little to soften the old heathen custom of "woe to the vanquished." Charlemagne's proselytizing campaigns had been as merciless as Mahomet's. But there is about this English king a divine patience, the rarest of all virtues in those who are set in high places. He accepts Guthrum's proffered terms at once, rejoicing over the chance of adding these fierce heathen warriors to the Church of his Master, by an act of mercy which even they must feel. And so the remnant of the army are allowed to march out of their

fortified camp, and to recross the Avon into Mercia, not quite five months after the day of their winter attack, and the seizing of Chippenham. The Northern army went away to Cirencester, where they stayed over the winter, and then returning into East Anglia settled down there, and Alfred and Wessex hear no more of them. Never was triumph more complete or better deserved; and in all history there is no instance of more noble use of victory than this. The West Saxon army was not at once disbanded. Alfred led them back to Athelney, where he had left his wife and children; and while they are there, seven weeks after the surrender, Guthrum, with thirty of the bravest of his followers, arrive to make good their pledge.

The ceremony of baptism was performed at Wedmore, a royal residence which had probably escaped the fate of Chippenham, and still contained a church. Here Guthrum and his thirty nobles were sworn in, the soldiers of a greater than Woden, and the white linen cloth, the sign of their new faith, was bound round their heads. Alfred himself was godfather to the viking, giving him the Christian name of Athelstan; and the chrism-loosing, or unbinding of the sacramental cloths, was performed on the eighth day by Ethelnoth, the faithful Alderman of Somersetshire. After the religious ceremony there still remained the task of settling the terms upon which the victors and vanquished were hereafter to live together side by side in the same island; for Alfred had the wisdom, even in his enemy's humiliation, to accept the accomplished fact, and to acknowledge East Anglia as a Danish

kingdom. The Witenagemot had been summoned to Wedmore, and was sitting there, and with their advice the treaty was then made, from which, according to some historians, English history begins.

We have still the text of the two documents which together contain Alfred and Guthrum's peace, or the Treaty of Wedmore; the first and shorter being probably the articles hastily agreed on before the capitulation of the Danish army at Chippenham, the latter the final terms settled between Alfred and his witan, and Guthrum and his thirty nobles, after mature deliberation and conference at Wedmore, but not formally executed until some years later.

The shorter one, that made at the capitulation, runs as follows:—

ALFRED AND GUTHRUM'S PEACE.

"This is the peace that King Alfred, and King Guthrum, and the witan of all the English nation and all the people that are in East Anglia, have all ordained and with oaths confirmed, for themselves and their descendants, as well for born as unborn, who reck of God's mercy, or of ours.

"First, concerning our land boundaries. These are up on the Thames, and then up on the Lea, and along the Lea unto its source, then straight to Bedford, then up the Ouse to Watling Street.

"Then there is this: if a man be slain we reckon all equally dear, English and Dane, at eight half marks of pure gold, except the churl who dwells on gavel land and their leisings; they are also equally

dear at 200 shillings. And if a king's thane be accused of manslaughter, if he desire to clear himself let him do so before twelve king's thanes. If any man accuse a man who is of less degree than king's thane, let him clear himself with eleven of his equals and one king's thane. And so in every suit which may be for more than four mancuses; and if he dare not, let him pay for it threefold as it may be valued.

Of Warrantors.

"And that every man know his warrantor, for men, and for horses, and for oxen.

"And we all ordained, on that day that the oaths were sworn, that neither bondman nor freeman might go to the army without leave, nor any of them to us. But if it happen that any of them from necessity will have traffic with us, or we with them, for cattle or goods, that is to be allowed on this wise: that hostages be given in pledge of peace, and as evidence whereby it may be known that the party has a clean book."

By the treaty Alfred is thus established as king of the whole of England south of the Thames; of all the old kingdom of Essex south of the Lea, including London, Hertford, and St. Albans; of the whole of the great kingdom of Mercia, which lay to the west of Watling Street, and of so much to the east as lay south of the Ouse. That he should have regained so much proves the straits to which he had brought the Northern army, who would have to give up all their

new settlements round Gloster. That he should have resigned so much of the kingdom which had acknowledged his grandfather, father, and brothers as overlords, proves how formidable his foe still was, even in defeat, and how thoroughly the north-eastern parts of the island had by this time been settled by the Danes.

The remainder of the short treaty would seem simply to be provisional, and intended to settle the relations between Alfred's subjects and the army while it remained within the limits of the new Saxon kingdom. Many of the soldiers would have to break up their homes in Glostershire; and, with this view, the halt at Cirencester is allowed, where, as we have already heard, they rest until the winter. While they remain in the Saxon kingdom there is to be no distinction between Saxon and Dane. The were-gild, or life-ransom, is to be the same in each case for men of like rank; and all suits for more than four mancuses (about twenty-four shillings) are to be tried by a jury of peers of the accused. On the other hand, only necessary communications are to be allowed between the Northern army and the people; and where there must be trading, fair and peaceful dealing is to be ensured by the giving of hostages. This last provision, and the clause declaring that each man shall know his warrantor, inserted in a five-clause treaty, where nothing but what the contracting parties must hold to be of the very first importance would find place, is another curious proof of the care with which our ancestors, and all Germanic tribes, guarded against

social isolation—the doctrine that one man has nothing to do with another—a doctrine which the great body of their descendants, under the leading of Schultze, Delitzsch, and others, seem likely to repudiate with equal emphasis in these latter days, both in Germany and England.

Thus, in July 878, the foundations of the new kingdom of England were laid, for new it undoubtedly became when the treaty of Wedmore was signed. The Danish nation, no longer strangers and enemies, are recognised by the heir of Cerdic as lawful owners of the full half of England. Having achieved which result, Guthrum and the rest of the new converts leave the Saxon camp and return to Cirencester at the end of twelve days, loaded with such gifts as it was still in the power of their conquerors to bestow: and Alfred was left in peace, to turn to a greater and more arduous task than any he had yet encountered.

CHAPTER XI.

RETROSPECT.

"*Whatsoever is brought on thee take cheerfully, and be patient when thou art changed to a low estate. For gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity.*"

THE great Danish invasion of England in the ninth century, the history of which we have just concluded, is one of those facts which meet us at every turn in the life of the world, raising again and again the deepest of all questions. At first sight it stands out simply as the triumph of brute force, cruelty, and anarchy, over civilization and order. It was eminently successful, for the greater part of the kingdom remained subject to the invaders. In its progress all such civilization as had taken root in the land was for the time trodden out; whole districts were depopulated; lands thrown out of cultivation; churches, abbeys, monasteries, the houses of nobles and peasants, razed to the ground; libraries (such as then existed) and works of art ruthlessly burnt and destroyed. It threw back all Alfred's reforms for eight years. To the poor East Anglian, or West Saxon churl or monk who had been living his quiet life there, honestly and in the fear of God, according to his lights,—to him hiding away in the swamps of the forest, amongst the

swine, running wild now for lack of herdsmen, and thinking bitterly of the sack of his home, and murder of his brethren, or of his wife and children by red-handed Pagans, the heavens would indeed seem tc be shut, and the earth delivered over to the powers of darkness. Would it not seem so to us, if we were in like case? Have we any faith which would stand such a strain as that?

Who shall say for himself that he has? and yet what Christian does not know, in his heart of hearts, that there is such a faith, for himself and for the world—the faith which must have carried Alfred through those fearful years, and strengthened him to build up a new and better England out of the ruins the Danes left behind them? For, hard as it must be to keep alive any belief or hope during a time when all around us is reeling, and the powers of evil seem to be let loose on the earth, when we look back upon these "days of the Lord" there is no truth which stands out more clearly on the face of history than this, that they all and each have been working towards order and life, that "the messengers of death have been indeed messengers of resurrection."

In the case of our fathers, in the England of a thousand years ago, we have not to go far to learn what the Danes had to do for them. There is no need to accept the statements of later writers as to the condition of the Saxons and Angles at the time of the invasion. Hoveden, after dwelling on the wars which were so common between the several kingdoms in the eighth and early part of the ninth centuries,

sums up, that in process of time all "virtue had so utterly disappeared in them that no nation whatsoever might compare with them for treachery and villany;" and in John Hardyng's rhymed Chronicle we find:

> "Thus in defaute of lawe and peace conserved
> Common profyte was wasted and devoured,
> Parcial profyte was sped and observed,
> And Venus also was commonly honoured—
> Among them was common, as the carte waye,
> Ryot, robbery, oppressyon, night and daye."

Such pictures are, no doubt, very highly coloured, and there is nothing in contemporary writers to justify them; nor can we believe that a nation in so utterly rotten a state would have met the Danes as the Angles and West Saxons did. But without going farther than Alfred's own writings, and the Saxon Chronicle and Asser, which contain, after all, the whole of the evidence at first hand which is left to us, we may see clearly enough that the nation, if not given over to "riot, robbery, and oppression, night and day," was settling on its lees. The country had become rich for those times under the long and vigorous rule of Egbert, and the people were busy and skilful in growing corn, and multiplying flocks and herds, and heaping up silver and gold. But the "common profyte" was more and more neglected, as "parcial profyte," individual gain, came to be the chief object in men's eyes. Then the higher life of the nation began to be undermined. The laws were unjustly interpreted and administered by hereditary aldermen,

who by degrees became almost independent of the king in their own shires and districts, in all matters not directly affecting his personal prerogative. The religious orders, who had been the protectors and instructors of the people, were tainted as deeply as the laity with the same self-seeking spirit. Alfred, in his preface to Gregory's pastoral, speaks sorrowfully of the wise men who were found formerly throughout the English race, both of the spiritual and secular condition—how the kings, and they who then had the government of the folk, "obeyed God and His messengers, and maintained their peace, their customs, and their government at home, and also increased their country abroad, and sped well both in war and wisdom"—how the religious orders were "earnest, both about doctrine and learning, and the services of God, so that men from abroad sought instruction in this land, which we must now get from them if we would have it." In Ethelwulf's reign both evils must have grown rapidly, for he was careless of his secular duties, and left alderman, and reeve, and sheriff more and more to follow their own ways, while he fostered the worst tendencies of his clergy, encouraging them to become more and more priests and keepers of the conscience, and less shepherds and instructors of the people. So religion was being separated from morality, and the inner and spiritual life of the nation was consequently dying out, and the people were falling into a dull, mechanical habit of mind. Their religion had become chiefly a matter of custom and routine; and, as a sure consequence, a sensual and grovelling

life was spreading through all classes. Soon material decay would follow, if it had not already begun; for healthy, manly effort, honest and patient digging and delving, planting and building, is not to be had out of man or nation whose conscience has been put to sleep. When the corn and wine and oil, the silver and the gold, have become the main object of worship —that which men or nations do above all things desire —sham work of all kinds, and short cuts, by what we call financing and the like, will be the means by which they will attempt to gain them.

When that state comes, men who love their country will welcome Danish invasions, civil wars, potato diseases, cotton famines, Fenian agitations, whatever calamity may be needed to awake the higher life again, and bid the nation arise and live.

That such visitations do come at such times as a matter of fact is as clear as that in certain states of the atmosphere we have thunderstorms. The thunderstorm comes with perfect certainty, and as part of a natural and fixed order. We are all agreed upon that now. We all believe, I suppose, that there is an order, —that there are laws which govern the physical world, asserting themselves as much in storm and earthquake as in the succession of night and day, of seed-time and harvest. We who are Christians believe that order and those laws to proceed from God, to be expressions of His will. Do we not also believe that men are under a divine order as much as natural things? that there is a law of righteousness founded on the will of God, as sure and abiding as the law of

gravitation? that this law of righteousness, this divine order, under which human beings are living on this earth, must and does assert and vindicate itself through and by the acts and lives of men, as surely as the divine order in nature asserts itself through the agency of the invisible powers in earth and sea and air?

Surely Christianity, whatever else it teaches, at any rate assures us of this. And when we have made this faith our own, when we believe it, and not merely believe that we believe it, we have in our hand the clue to all human history. Mysteries in abundance will always remain. We may not be able to trace the workings of the law of righteousness in the confusions and bewilderments of our own day, or through the darkness and mist which shrouds so much of the life of other times and other races. But we know that it is there, and that it has its ground in a righteous will, which was the same a thousand years ago as it is to-day, which every man and nation can get to know; and just in so far as they know and obey which will they be founding families, institutions, states, which will abide.

If we want to test this truth in the most practical manner, we have only to take any question which has troubled, or is troubling, statesmen and rulers and nations, in our own day. The slavery question is the greatest of these, at any rate the one which has been most prominently before the world of late. In the divine order that institution was not recognised, there was no place at all set apart for it; on the contrary, He on whose will that order rests had said that He came

to break every yoke. And so slavery would give our kindred in America no rest, just as it would give us no rest in the first thirty years of the century. The nation, desiring to go on living its life, making money, subduing a continent,

> "Pitching new states as old-world men pitch tents,"

tried every plan for getting rid of the "irrepressible negro" question, except the only one recognised in the divine order—that of making him free. The ablest and most moderate men, the Websters and Clays, thought and spoke and worked to keep it on its legs. Missouri compromises were agreed to, "Mason and Dixon's lines" laid down, joint committees of both Houses—at last even a "crisis committee," as it was called—invented plan after plan to get it fairly out of the way by any means except the only one which the eternal law, the law of righteousness, prescribed. But He whose will must be done on earth was no party to Missouri compromises, and Mason and Dixon's line was not laid down on His map of North America. And there never were wanting men who could recognise His will, and denounce every compromise, every endeavour to set it aside, or escape from it, as a "covenant with death and hell." Despised and persecuted men—Garrisons and John Browns—were raised up to fight this battle, with tongue and pen and life's blood, the weak things of this world to confound the mighty; men who could look bravely in the face the whole power and strength of their nation in the faith of the old prophet: "Associate yourselves

and ye shall be broken in pieces; gather yourselves together and it shall come to nought, for God is with us." And at last the thunderstorm broke, and when it cleared away the law of righteousness had asserted itself once again, and the nation was delivered.

And so it has been, and is, and will be to the end of time with all nations. We have all our "irrepressible" questions of one kind or another, more or less urgent, rising up again and again to torment and baffle us, refusing to give us any peace until they have been settled in accordance with the law of righteousness, which is the will of God. No clever handling of them will put them to rest. Such work will not last. If we have wisdom and faith enough amongst us to ascertain and do that will, we may settle them for ourselves in clear skies. If not, the clouds will gather, the atmosphere grow heavy, and the storm break in due course, and they will be settled for us in ways which we least expect or desire, for it is "the Lord's controversy."

In due course! perhaps; but what if this due course means lifetimes, centuries? Alas! this is indeed the cry which has been going up from the poor earth these thousands of years—

> "The priests and the rulers are swift to wrong,
> And the mills of God are slow to grind."

How long, O Lord, how long? The precise times and seasons man shall never know on this earth. These the Lord has kept in His own power. But courage, my brother! Can we not see, the blindest

of us, that the mills are working swiftly, at least in our day? This is no age in which shams or untruths, whether old or new, are likely to have a quiet time or a long life of it. In all departments of human affairs —religious, political, social—we are travelling fast, in England and elsewhere, and under the hand and guidance, be sure, of Him who made the world, and is able and willing to take care of it. Only let us quit ourselves like men, trusting to Him to put down whatsoever loveth or maketh a lie, and in His own time to establish the new earth in which shall dwell righteousness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING'S BOARD OF WORKS.

"Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build."
"Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

IT is scarcely possible to exaggerate the amount and difficulty of the work which lay before Alfred there at Wedmore, when he had at last got fairly rid of Guthrum and the army, and was able to think about something else than prompt fighting. The witan was assembled there, and may probably have counselled their king on many parts of that work. We only know, that they considered and passed the Treaty of Wedmore, and forfeited the lands of certain nobles who had been false to their oaths of allegiance. The council would not have remained sitting a day longer than they could help, as it must have been already getting towards harvest-time. They left their king, still young in years, but old in experience and thoughtfulness, to set about his work of building up the nation again as best it might please him.

We cannot doubt that with Athelney and Ethandune fresh in his mind, and Guthrum's army still undisbanded at Cirencester, his first thought and care will

have been of the defence of the realm for the future, and one of his first acts to commence the restoration of the forts and strong places. Dr. Giles points out the striking contrast in these early wars between the Saxons and Danes in their skill in the erection and use of fortifications. Through the whole of these wars the former seem scarcely ever able to hold a town or fort, if we except Cynuit; while the Danes never lose one. At the beginning of each year of the war the chroniclers relate monotonously, how the Pagans seize some town or strong place, such as Nottingham, Reading, Exeter, Chippenham, apparently without difficulty, certainly with no serious delay; but when once they are in it they are never dislodged by force. In the same way, none of their fortified camps, such as that at Wareham, were ever taken; and the remains at Uffington Castle and Bratton Castle show how skilful they were in these military earthworks, and what formidable places the crests of hills on the open downs became under their hands. Alfred never lost a hint, for he had a mind thoroughly humble, and therefore open to the reception of new truth; so in setting to work to restore the forts which had been destroyed or damaged, we may be sure he profited by the lessons of the great struggle. At what time, or in what order, the restoration took place, we have no hint. In this, as in almost all parts of Alfred's work, we only know the results. How efficiently it was done, however, between the peace of Wedmore and the next great war, which broke out in 893, we may gather from the fact that the great leader of

that invasion, Hasting, was never able to take an important town or stronghold.

That terrible viking, who for years had been the scourge of the French coasts, was in this same autumn of 879 at Fulham. Dr. Pauli, who has remarkable sagacity in suggesting what the short vague notices in the Chronicles really mean, thinks that Hasting had been with Guthrum both at Ethandune and Chippenham, and from thence accompanied the beaten army to Cirencester. That after the return of the Danish king and his thirty nobles from their baptism at Wedmore, he left the army, taking with him his own followers, and all those of the army who refused to become Christians, and with these sailed round the south coast, and up the Thames to Fulham. On the other hand, after such a lesson of the power wielded by Alfred, and his capacity as a leader, one must doubt whether so able a commander as Hasting would have been ready at once to open another campaign in Wessex. The Saxon Chronicle simply says that "a body of pirates drew together, and sat down at Fulham on the Thames;" Asser, that "a large army of Pagans sailed from foreign parts into the river Thames, and joined the army which was already in the country." On the whole, it seems more probable that Hasting, or whoever was the leader of the Danes who wintered at Fulham in this year, came from abroad, and was joined there by the wild spirits from Guthrum's army, the resolute Pagans and pirates to whom peaceful life was thoroughly distasteful. The greater part of that

army certainly never left Cirencester till the next spring, and remained faithful to the terms of the Treaty of Wedmore. So the Danes at Fulham, seeing no chance of rousing their countrymen to another attempt on Alfred's crown and kingdom, and witnessing through the autumn and winter months the vigour with which the King was providing for the defence of the country, sailed away to Ghent. And from this time, for upwards of four precious years, no band of Pagans landed on English soil, and the whole land had rest, and King Alfred leisure to turn to all the great reforms that he had in his mind.

So, for one thing, the rebuilding and strengthening of the fortresses all along the coast could now go on without hindrance. The whole of the bookland of England was held subject to the building of bridges and fortresses, and marching against an enemy, so that the whole manhood of the kingdom might have been at once turned upon this work. But Alfred had learned in the first years of his reign that his people would not well bear forcing; moreover, he had new ideas on the subject of building; was feeling his way towards the substitution of stone for wood-work, and importing the most skilled masons to be found on the Continent to instruct his own people. In his scriptural readings, too, he will have become acquainted with the story of Solomon's buildings; how that wisest of monarchs, by the forced labour on his magnificent public works, exhausted the energies and alienated the affections of his people, an example to be carefully avoided by a Christian king. Such of the

strong places, then, on the coast and elsewhere as belonged to the King himself, rose steadily without haste and without pause from their ruins, with all the newest improvements which the best foreign workmen, or the experience of the late war, could suggest. At first it did not fare so well with those which had to be entrusted to others, and nothing can give us a more vivid impression of the dead weight of indifference and stupidity which Alfred had to contend against in his early efforts than the passage in Asser which speaks of this business, of restoring these fortified places. It occurs under the year 887, by which time it is plain, from the end of the passage, that the King had triumphed over all his difficulties, and had inspired the officers in all parts of his kingdom with some of his own spirit and energy. "What shall I say," writes his faithful friend, "of the cities and towns which he restored, and of others which he built where none had been before? of the royal halls and chambers wonderfully erected by his command, with wood and stone? of the royal residences, constructed of stone, removed from their old sites, and handsomely rebuilt under his direction in more suitable places?" probably where they were less open to assaults, such as those which had taken Reading and Chippenham. "Besides the disease above mentioned, he was disturbed by the quarrels of his friends, who would voluntarily undergo little or no toil, though it were for the common need of the kingdom; but he alone, sustained by the aid of Heaven, like a skilful pilot strove to steer his ship laden with much wealth into the safe and much-desired

harbour, though almost all his crew were tired, and suffered them not to faint, or hesitate, though sailing amidst the manifold waves and eddies of this present life. For all his bishops, earls, nobles, favourite ministers and prefects, who, next to God and the king, had the whole government of the kingdom, as is fitting, continually received from him instruction, respect, exhortation, and command—nay, at last, when they continued disobedient, and his long patience was exhausted, he would reprove them severely, and censure their vulgar folly and obstinacy; and thus he directed their attention to his own will, and to the common interests of the kingdom. Owing, however, to the sluggishness of his people, these admonitions of the King were either not fulfilled, or begun late in the hour of need, and so fell out the less to the advantage of those who executed them. For I will say nothing of the castles which he ordered to be built, but which, being begun late, were never finished, because the enemy broke in upon them by sea and land, and, as often fell out, the thwarters of the King's will repented when it was too late, and were ashamed at their non-performance of his commands. I speak of repentance when it is too late," the good Bishop indignantly continues, "on the testimony of Scripture, by which it appears that numberless persons have had cause for too much sorrow after many insidious evils have come to pass. But though by these means, sad to say, they may be bitterly afflicted and roused to sorrow by the loss of fathers, wives, children, ministers, servant-men, servant-maids, and furniture and house-

hold stuff, what is the use of hateful repentance, when their kinsmen are dead, and they cannot aid them, or redeem those who are captive from captivity? for they are not able even to assist those who have escaped, as they have not wherewith to sustain even their own lives. They repented, therefore, when it was too late, and grieved at their incautious neglect of the King's commands, and praised the King's wisdom with one voice, and tried with all their power to fulfil what they had before refused; that is to say, the erection of castles, and other things generally useful to the whole kingdom."

A vivid picture, truly, of the state of things in England a thousand years ago, for all of which might we not without much research find parallels enough in our own day? One would fain hope that we are not altogether without some equivalent in late years for that patient, never-faltering pressure of the King, sometimes lighting up into scathing reproof of the "vulgar folly and obstinacy" of many of those through whom he has to work. It is refreshing to find a bishop fairly roused by these squabbles—this unreasoning sluggishness of men who called themselves the King's friends, and should have been doing the work he had appointed them—denouncing the repentance of such, after the mischief has been done, as "hateful," not a worthy act at all, or one likely to deserve the approbation of God or the King, in this bishop's judgment.

The reference to the "breaking in of the enemy by land and sea" upon the unfinished fortifications, must

point to the years between 872 and 878; for from the date of the peace of Wedmore no strong place of the Saxons was taken during Alfred's life. It was not until 885 that the Northmen even ventured on any descent in force on the coast of England. In that year the army which had gathered round the band of old heathen rovers who followed Hasting from Fulham to Ghent in the spring of 880, and had been ravaging the banks of the Meuse and the Scheldt ever since, after wintering at Amiens, at last broke in two. One half, under a leader whose name has not come down to us, took to their ships, and, in their old form, stole up the Thames and Medway, and made a sudden dash at Rochester. But now for the first time they were completely foiled in their first onslaught. They could not storm the place, which was well fortified and gallantly held, so they threw up strong works before the gates, in hopes of taking the town by famine or storm before succour could arrive. In this, however, they were soon undeceived. Alfred appeared promptly in Kent at the head of a strong force, and, without awaiting his attack, the Danes fled to their ships, leaving great spoil which they had brought with them from France, including a number of horses and prisoners, in their fortified camp before Rochester Gate. And so they betake themselves to France again, having found this visit to England very decidedly unprofitable.

We may fairly conclude then, that by the year 885 those provoking bishops, earls, nobles, favourite ministers, and prefects, had come to their senses,

and had learnt to obey their king's commands, and to see that there was good reason for anything he might set them to work on. Thus, as the fruit of years of patient and steady pressure, at last Alfred has his forts in order, a chain of them all round the southern coast some say, and his royal residences and larger towns for the most part sufficiently protected against sudden attack, so far as walls and ditches will secure them. London only still lies in a miserably defenceless state, all the best parts in ruins, the respectable inhabitants fled across seas or into Wessex; and only a wild, lawless population, the sweepings of many nations and tribes, left to haunt the river side, picking up a precarious living, no one can tell how, and ready to join any band of marauders who might be making use of the deserted houses. The great city which had been almost able to stand alone, and assert its independence of Mercia or of any overlord, ever since Ethelwulf's time, has fallen to be a mere colony of 'long-shore men, gathering round changing bands of pirates. The city has been Alfred's ever since the Treaty of Wedmore, and he has been no doubt carefully considering what can be done, and preparing to deal with it; but it is an arduous and expensive undertaking, and has to wait till more pressing building operations—particularly the necessary coast defences—have been completed.

At length in 886 all his preparations are made, and he marches on London with a sufficient force to deal with such organized bands of Northmen as might for the time be holding it, and with the 'long-shore popu-

lation. Ethelwerd's Chronicle speaks of a siege, and Huntingdon's of a 'great force of Danes,' who fled when the place was invested; but the Saxon Chronicle and Asser contain no hint, either of a siege, or of any organized force within the city. It is probable therefore that London submitted to Alfred at once without a blow. Here, in what had been even in Roman times the great commercial capital of England, his splendid organizing talents had full scope during the year. The accounts in the best authorities agree entirely as to this work of 886. They are short and graphic. "In this year Alfred, King of the West Saxons, after the burning of cities and slaying of the people, honourably rebuilt the city of London, and made it again habitable. He gave it into the custody of his son-in-law Ethelred, alderman of Mercia; to which king all the Angles and Saxons who before had been dispersed everywhere, or were in bondage under the Pagans, voluntarily turned, and submitted themselves to his dominion." The foreign masons and mechanics, of whom Alfred by this time had large numbers in his regular pay, made swift work with the rebuilding of London; and within a few years, under Ethelred's rule, the city had regained its old pre-eminence. Saxons, Angles, and Danes thronged to it indiscriminately, the latter occupying their own quarters. A colony of them settled on the southern side of the river, and built Southwark (Syd virke, the southern fortification), where one of the principal thoroughfares, Tooley Street (a corruption of St. Olave's Strect), still bears the name of the

patron saint of Norway. On the northern side of the Thames also, to the west of the city, they established another settlement, in which was their chief burial-place, and named it St. Clement Danes. We may reckon the rebuilding and resettlement of London as the crowning act of the King's work as a restorer of the fenced cities of his realm, and have now to follow him, as well as the confused materials at our command will allow us, in other departments no less difficult to handle than this of the Board of Works, in which his wise and unflagging energy was bringing order out of chaos, and economizing and developing the great resources of his kingdom.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING'S WAR OFFICE AND ADMIRALTY.

And I took the chief of your tribes, wise men and known, and made them heads over you, captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers amongst your tribes."

THE restoration of all the old fortresses of the kingdom, and the building of a number of fresh ones, though apparently the work which Alfred thought of first, and pressed on most vigorously, was after all only a reform of second-rate importance compared with the reconstruction and permanent organization of his army and navy. This also he took in hand at once, going straight to the root of the matter, as indeed was always the habit with this king, his whole nature being of a thoroughness which would never allow him to work only on the surface.

It is by no means easy to understand the military organization of the West Saxons before Alfred's reign, if indeed they had anything that may be called an organization. That every freeman was liable to a call to arms whenever the country was threatened by an enemy, or the king was bent on invading his neighbour's territory—and that the king had no force of his own, but was in the hands of his aldermen and earls, and obliged to rely on what force

they could bring together—this seems clear enough, but unfortunately we have no means of knowing with any accuracy how the call was made, what were the penalties for disobeying it, or the conditions of service in the field,—whether the soldier received pay and rations, or had to support himself. So far as we can gather from the meagre accounts of the wars in Ethelwulf's and Ethelred's reign, and of Alfred's early campaigns, as soon as danger threatened the hereditary alderman of the shire nearest the point of attack summoned all freeholders within his jurisdiction, and took the field at once, while the king, through their aldermen, gathered troops in other shires, and brought them up to the scene of action as fast as he could. Thus in 861 the Aldermen Osric and Ethelwulf, with the men of Hants and Berks, fell at once upon the pillagers of Winchester without waiting for King Ethelbert; and again Ethelwulf, ten years later, in 871, fights the battle of Englefield with the first division of the Danish army from Reading, only three days after the arrival of the Pagans, before Ethelred and Alfred can come up. More instances might be cited, if needed, to show that either the penalties on slackness in coming to muster were very sharp, or that the zeal of the West Saxons for fighting was of the strongest. As a rule, the men of the shire might evidently be relied on to meet the first brunt of attack. It is equally clear that these levies could not be depended upon for any lengthened time. They dwindled away after a few weeks, or months, on the approach of harvest,

or the failure in supplies, or zeal. In short, the system was practically, to a great extent, a voluntary one, and very uncertain in its operation, throwing altogether unfair burdens now on this district, now on the other, as the Pagans gained a fortified position in Berkshire, Dorsetshire, or Wiltshire.

During his early campaigns Alfred must have seen the disadvantage at which he and the West Saxons were placed by this haphazard system, and have gradually matured the changes which he was now able to introduce. These were somewhat as follow. The whole fighting strength of the kingdom was divided into three parts or companies. Of these, one company was called out, Asser says, and remained on duty, "night and day, for one month, after which they returned to their homes, and were relieved by the second company. At the end of the second month, in the same way, the third company relieved the second, who returned to their homes, where they spent two months," until their turn for service came round again. No military service was required of any man beyond three months in the year, so that during the three winter months neither of the three military companies was on duty. Of the company on duty for the time being, a portion was told off for the defence of the principal fortresses, and the remainder constituted a body-guard or standing army, moving about under arms with the King and court.

This at least is the account which has come down to us, but it is obviously incomplete or incorrect. It is quite impossible that a third of the fighting strength

of the whole kingdom could have been constantly maintained under arms by Alfred. For, whatever may have been the case in the times of his father and brothers, there can be little doubt that he both maintained and paid his soldiers. This appears from his own writings, as well as from the chroniclers. After declaring that he had never much yearned after earthly power, the King goes on (in the interpolation in the seventeenth chapter of his translation of Boethius): "Nevertheless I was desirous of materials for the work which I was commanded to perform; that is, that I might honourably and fitly exercise the power which was entrusted to me. Moreover, no man can show any skill, or exercise or control any power, without tools and materials; that is, of every craft the materials without which man cannot exercise the craft. This, then, is a king's material, and his tools to reign with—that he have his land well peopled. He must have bead-men and soldiers and workmen; without these tools no king can show his craft. This is also his material that he must have as well as the tools—provision for the three classes. This is then their provision; land to live on, and pay, and weapons, and meat, and ale, and clothes, and whatsoever is necessary for the three classes. He cannot without these preserve the tools, or without the tools accomplish any of those things which he is commanded to perform. Therefore I was desirous of materials wherewith to exercise the power, that my work and the report thereof should not be forgotten or hidden. For every craft and

every power soon becomes old, and is passed over in silence, if it be without wisdom. Because whatsoever is done through folly no one can ever reckon for craft. This I will now truly say, that while I have lived I have striven to live worthily, and after my life to leave to the men who were after me my memory in good works."

I could not touch the passage without quoting it whole; for, while treading on dangerous ground, it seems to me to vindicate "king-craft" as Alfred understood and practised it, and to throw a gleam of light on his brave and pious life which we cannot spare. "King-craft" in the mouth of James I. meant the professional cleverness of the sovereign—that cunning, a substitute for courage, by which he, as king, could gain his selfish ends and exalt his office, as he understood it. A contemptible, not to say hateful meaning, which the phrase has retained ever since in England. Alfred's idea of kingcraft is "a work which he is *commanded to* perform," which it is woe to him if he fail in performing. The two ideas are as wide apart as the character and work of the two kings.

But the evidence does not rest on this passage. Asser, speaking of the division which the King made of his income, says that one-third of the part which he devoted to secular purposes went to pay his soldiers and ministers; and Florence, that "he gave the first portion of his income yearly to his soldiers." Now, however highly we may be inclined to reckon Alfred's income, it is quite impossible to suppose that one-

sixth of it could have found weapons, meat, ale, and clothes, as well as pay, for anything like a third of his available force. It is probable, then, that only a small part of the company whose turn it might be for active service were actually called out, and kept under arms, either with the court, or in the fortresses. These were paid by the King, while the remainder of the company were not paid, unless they too were actually called out, though during their month they were no doubt constantly exercised, and kept in readiness to muster at any moment.

It is not, however, of much importance, even if it were possible to ascertain the precise detail of Alfred's military reforms. The essence and result of them is clear enough; namely, that he had always a full third of his whole force ready to act against an enemy at a moment's notice, and that the burdens of military service were equally distributed over the whole kingdom.

Side by side with the fortifications of his coast-towns, and the re-organization of his land-forces, the King pushed on with energy the construction of such a navy as would enable him to beat the Northmen on their own element. We have seen that, early in his first short interval of peace, he was busy with this work, having no doubt even then satisfied himself that his kingdom could only be effectually defended by sea. In 875 he puts to sea for the first time, and fights his first naval battle with success, taking one of the sea-king's ships. This will have given him a model upon which to improve

the build of his own ships. He accordingly, in 877, "commands boats and long ships to be built throughout the kingdom, in order that he might offer battle by sea to the enemy as they were coming, and on board of these he placed seamen, and appointed them to watch the seas." The result of this wise foresight was the destruction of the Danish fleet off Swanage, on its way to the relief of Exeter.

But the West Saxon ships were no better than the enemy's, until Alfred's practical sagacity and genius for mechanics were brought to bear on shipbuilding. The precise year in which the great reconstruction of his fleet was made is not ascertainable. The Saxon Chronicle places it as late as 897, but it will be convenient to notice it here while we are on the subject. The vessels then which, after much study of the matter, he ordered to be built, were twice as long and high as those of the Danes, and had forty, sixty, or in some instances even a larger number of oars. They were also, it is said, swifter and steadier than the older vessels, as well as longer and higher, and "were shapen neither like the Frisian nor the Danish, but so as it seemed to the King they would be most efficient." Alfred's galleys are perhaps less puzzling than the Greek trireme; at the same time it is not easy to imagine how the account in the Chronicle can be correct. Galleys would naturally be slower in proportion to their height, though of course much more formidable as fighting-vessels. The West Saxon was not a seafaring man; at best was only inclined to go on board ship for

some definite and immediate piece of fighting, and the King's regular fleet was manned by sailors of many tribes,—Frisians, Franks, Britons, Scots, Armoricans; even pagan Danes, who took service with him. And all these, of whatever race, "according to their merits, were ruled, loved, honoured, and enriched by Alfred." And in this department, as in his military reforms, results at once and abundantly justified his sagacity, for he was never badly worsted in a sea-fight, and towards the end of his reign his fleet had swept the coasts of England clear of the sea-rovers.

Within two years after the peace of Wedmore the fleet was ready to go to sea, and it was not a day too soon. At no former time, indeed, were the western coasts of Europe more terribly scourged by the Northmen. The great empire of Charlemagne, broken into weak fragments, was overrun by them. The army that had so recently left Fulham under the leadership of Hasting, reinforced by constant arrivals from Norway and Denmark, had left Ghent in 881, and laid waste the banks of the Meuse and the Scheldt. They were even now pressing southwards, and threatening Paris and Amiens. It is a time for vigilance and prompt action if the new kingdom is to be consolidated in peace. One small squadron of the Northmen, sweeping south, turn towards the English coasts in the hope of plunder, in the summer of 882, and find the King ready for them. Alfred himself goes to meet them; and of the four Danish vessels two were taken fighting and all hands killed, and the

commanders of the remaining two surrendered after a desperate resistance. "They were sorely distressed and wounded," the Chronicle remarks, "before they surrendered."

But the first occasion on which the new organization of the forces of the kingdom was put to any severe test was not until three years later, when the attempt on Rochester, already mentioned, was made. To understand the importance of it, we must go back to the time when Guthrum Athelstan crossed the Mercian borders, under solemn pledges to settle quietly down as undisputed king of East Anglia, under nominal allegiance, indeed, to his great conqueror, but practically as the equal sovereign of a friendly but independent kingdom. Unluckily for the good resolutions of the new convert, there was a tempter at his elbow. One Isembart, a near relative of Carloman, king of the Western Franks, had been exiled by that monarch, and had served with Guthrum in his last invasion of Wessex. He is bound for his own country, where there are all manner of chances in these times for rebels; and the king of East Anglia, unable to resist the scent of battle and the chances of plunder, accompanies him with a force. After a short career of atrocities, Guthrum Athelstan is defeated in a battle near Sancourt, and returns to East Anglia, having, on the one hand, roused Alfred's suspicions, and on the other restored his own relations with Hasting and the Northern bands. During the next year or two settlements of pirates are allowed to establish themselves on the East Anglian coasts,

and before 885 several of the hostages given to Alfred after the battle of Ethandune had died, and their places remained unfilled. In short, there are the gravest reasons for Alfred to doubt the good faith, or the good-will, of Guthrum Athelstan and his people.

At this crisis came the Danish descent on Kent and siege of Rochester, abandoned precipitately by the invaders on the prompt advance of Alfred. They fled to their ships and made off, some back to the French coast, and others across the Thames to Essex. Here they found shelter and assistance in Bemfleet and other places, which had become little better than nests of heathen pirates, without any hindrance, if not with the open sanction, of the ex-viking, now Christian king of East Anglia. Alfred's patience is now fairly exhausted, and, resolved to give his faithless ally a severe lesson, he gathers a fleet at once in the Medway, puts troops on board, and sends them after the last division of the invaders, with orders to retaliate, or, as Asser puts it, "for the sake of plunder." The West Saxon fleet soon fell in with sixteen Danish vessels, followed them up the Stour, and, after a hard fight, took the whole of them, and put the crews to the sword. Had the King himself been on board, the success would most likely have been complete. As it was, the pirate communities of the East Anglian coast hastily got together another fleet, with which they attacked the King's fleet at the mouth of the river "while they were reposing," and gained some advantage over them.

The Saxon Chronicle and Asser both add to the occurrences of the year that "the army which dwelt in East Anglia disgracefully broke the peace which they had concluded with King Alfred." Dr. Pauli also notices a visit of Rollo to East Anglia at this same time, the great viking having quitted the siege of Paris to answer the summons of his old comrade in arms. But the English chroniclers are silent on the subject, and it would seem that the cloud passed away without further hostilities. Alfred had every reason to be satisfied with the first trial and proof of his re-organized fleet and army, and had read the people of the East Anglian coast a lesson which they would not lightly forget. Guthrum Athelstan, for his part, may have either repented of his bad faith, and resolved to amend and live quietly, as we may hope, or had come to the conclusion, alone or in consultation with Rollo, that there is nothing but sure and speedy defeat to be gained by an open rupture with Alfred. In any case he took no active step to avenge the invasion of his kingdom, or to retaliate, and from that time lived peaceably to the day of his death in 890.

"A Prince, then," says Machiavelli (cap. xiv.), "is to have no other design, nor thought, nor study but war and the arts and disciplines thereof: for indeed this is the only possession worthy of a prince, and is of so much importance that it not only preserves those that are born princes in their patrimonies, but advances men of private condition to that honourable degree." To which saying those who least admire the great

Italian will agree to this extent, that the arts and disciplines of war should form the main object of a prince's study until he has made his country as safe against foreign attack as it can be made without dwarfing the nation's life. This is what Alfred did for his kingdom and people, between the peace of Wedmore and the autumn of 885. His reward was profound peace for eight more years.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KING'S LAWS.

"*Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son.*
"*Then shall he judge Thy people according to the right, and defend the poor.*"

THE king's next work after putting his kingdom in a state of defence, and to the best of his ability ensuring his people a safe country to live in, is to give them laws for the ordering and governing of their lives.

This business of laying down rules as to how his English people shall be governed seems one of altogether startling solemnity and importance to Alfred; and is, indeed, not a business which it is desirable that any king, or parliament, or other persons or bodies, should undertake lightly. It would be instructive to inquire carefully how much of the trouble and misery which has come upon the land since his time has been caused by the want of Alfred's spirit in this matter of law-making. We have had at one time or another, during the past thousand years, as terrible experience as most nations of what strong men, or strong classes of men, can do in the way of making laws to assert

their own wills. The laws imposing all sorts of religious disabilities, the combination laws, the corn laws, are only some of the best known instances of attempts in this direction. The Statute-book is not yet clear of them, and who can hope that we have seen their end, though just at present there is happily no class strong enough to impose its own will on the nation? Our sins just now in this matter of law-making are rather those of indifference, or cowardice. Hand-to-mouth legislation, as it has been called—a desire to ride off on side issues, not to meet our difficulties fairly in the face, but rather to do such temporary tinkering as will just tide over the immediate crisis—is our temptation.

Here, indeed, in our law-making, as in all other departments of human life, the loss of faith in God is bearing its fruit, and taking all nerve and tone out of our system. For that loss must be fatal to all high ideal, and without a high ideal no people will ever have or make good laws. Alfred has left us no doubt as to his. There is an order laid down from everlasting for the government of mankind, so he believes, which is the expression of the will of God, and to which man has to conform. He himself finds it about his path, and about his bed, established already on every side of him. He has become aware of it gradually, by the experience of his own life, through his own failures and successes. He has been educated by these into the knowledge that he, the King, is himself under a government, even the government of Him whose laws the material universe,

all created things, obey, but whose highest empire is in the hearts and wills of men. Ruling and making laws are no light matter to one who has made this discovery; he can exercise neither function according to his own pleasure or caprice, or for his own ends. His one aim as a law-maker must be, to recognise and declare those eternal laws of God—as a ruler, to bring his own life, and that of his people, into accordance with them.

Coming, then, to his task with this view, we find Alfred's code, or "Alfred's dooms," as they are called, starting with an almost literal transcript of the Decalogue. The only variations of any moment are, that the second commandment is omitted in its right place, and stands as the tenth (in the words of the 23d verse of the 20th of Exodus), "Work not thou for thyself golden gods or silver," and that in the fourth the Saxon text runs, "In six days Christ wrought the heavens and earth and all shapen things that in them are, and rested on the seventh day: and for that the Lord hallowed it." The substitution of Christ for the Lord here is characteristic of the King. Immediately after the ten commandments come selections from the Mosaic code, chiefly from the 21st, 22d, and 23d chapters of Exodus, very slightly modified.

The most important variations are as follow:—

EXODUS XXI.	ALFRED'S DOOMS.
1. Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.	11. These are the dooms that thou shalt set them:—If any one buy a Christian bondsman, be he
2. If thou buy a Hebrew servant,	

six years he shall serve, and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

3. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

4. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

5. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

6. Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him unto the door, or unto the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him for ever.

bondsman to him six years, the seventh be he free unbought. With such clothes as he went in, with such go he out. If he himself have a wife, go she out with him. If, however, the lord gave him a wife, go she and her bairn the lord's. If then the bondsman say, I will not go from my lord, nor from my wife, nor from my bairn, nor from my goods, let then his lord bring him to the church door, and drill through his ear with an awl, to witness that he be ever thenceforth a bondsman.

The dooms continue an almost literal transcript of the 21st chapter of Exodus, with the exception of the 17th verse, which is omitted. The slight modifications of the Hebrew Law in the first verses of the 22d chapter are again characteristic.

EXODUS XXII.	ALFRED'S DOOMS.
1. If a man shall steal an ox or a sheep and kill it, or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep	24. If any one steal another's ox, and slay or sell him, give he two for it, and four sheep for one. If he have not what he may give, be he himself sold for the fee.
2. If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.	25. If a thief break a man's house by night and be there slain, be he not guilty of manslaughter. If he doeth this after sunrise he is
3. If the sun be risen upon	

him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then shall he be sold for his theft.

4. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep, he shall restore double.

5. If a man shall cause a field, or a vineyard, to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.

guilty of manslaughter, and himself shall die, unless he did it of necessity. If with him be found alive what he before stole, let him pay for it twofold.

26. If any man harm another man's vineyard, his acres, or any of his lands, let him make boot as men value it.

To the 8th verse, treating of property entrusted to another, Alfred's dooms add, "If it were live cattle, and he say that the army took it, or that it died of itself, and he have witness, he need not pay for it. If he have no witness, and they believe him not, let him then swear." We shall see that the obligation of an oath, which had no sanction attached to it apparently by West Saxon law till now, is very carefully enforced in a later part of the code. Alfred's dooms then omit from the 7th to the 15th verse of the chapter inclusive, taking all the rest; with the variation, however, as to pledges, that the Saxons are to return a man's pledged garment before sunset only "if he have but one wherewith to cover him."

The 3d and 6th verses of the 23d chapter are a puzzle to the King, so he substitutes dooms in his own language, which are certainly clearer than the Hebrew ones.

EXODUS XXIII. 3, 6.	ALFRED'S DOOMS.
3 Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.	43. Doom thou very evenly; doom thou not one doom to the wealthy, another to the poor; nor one doom to the more loved, other to the more loathed doom thou not.
6. Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.	

Alfred adopts the next three verses in the following form:—

EXODUS XXIII. 7, 8, 9.	ALFRED'S DOOMS.
7. Keep thee far from a false matter, and the innocent and righteous slay thou not, for I will not justify the wicked.	44. Shun thou aye leasings.
8. And thou shalt take no gift; for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.	45. A sooth fast man and guiltless, slay thou him never.
9. Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for yé know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.	46. Take thou never meed monies, for they blind full oft wise men's thoughts, and turn aside their words.
	47. To the stranger and comer from abroad, meddle thou not with him, nor oppress thou him with no unright.

Then, omitting all the rest of the Levitical law as given in this part of Exodus, as to cultivation of the land, the sabbatical year, sacrifices, and feasts, the dooms end with:—

48. Swear ye never to heathen gods, nor in nothing call ye to them.

The old Odin worship is not yet quite extinct in Wessex.

Having finished his extracts from Exodus, in all forty-eight dooms, the King proceeds:—

"These are the dooms that the Almighty God himself spake to Moses, and bade him to hold; and

when the Lord's only-begotten Son, our God, that is, Christ the healer, on middle earth came, He said that He came not these dooms to break, nor to gainsay, but with all good to do, and with all mild-heartedness and lowly-mindedness to teach them. Then after His throes, ere that His apostles were gone through all the world to teach, and while yet they were together, many heathen nations turned they to God. While they all together were, they send errand-doers to Antioch, and to Syria, Christ's law to teach. When they understood that they sped not, then sent they an errand-writing to them." Then follows *verbatim* James' epistle from the Jerusalem council to the Church at Antioch; after which Alfred again goes on: "That ye will that other men do not to you, do ye not that to other men. From this one doom a man may think that he should doom every one rightly; he need keep no other doom-book. Let him take heed that he doom to no man that he would not that he doom to him, if he sought doom over him."

So far it would seem that the King has no doubt, or need of consultation with any one. These are, in his view, the dooms which the Almighty God himself has given to the king and people of England, as well as to the Hebrews of old. The remaining dooms stand on different ground. They are such as have been ordained by his forefathers and their wise men, with such additions and variations as he and his wise men approve. They are introduced thus:—

"Since that time, it happened that many nations

took to Christ's faith, and there were many synods through all the middle earth gathered, and eke throughout the English race they took to Christ's faith through holy bishops, and other wise men. They then set forth, for their mild-heartedness, that Christ taught as to almost every misdeed, that the worldly lords might, with their leave, without sin, for the first guilt, take their fee boot which they then appointed, except for treason against a lord, to which they durst not declare any mild-heartedness, for that the Almighty God doomed none to them that slighted Him, nor Christ, God's Son, doomed none to him that sold Him to death, and He bade to love a lord as himself." Nevertheless, Alfred and his witan, by the 4th article of their code, modify this of the synods, and place the king and lords on the same footing as other freemen, by recognising the king's and lords' were-gild. "They then," the preface goes on, "in many synods set a boot for many misdeeds of men; and in many books they wrote here one doom, there another.

"I then, Alfred the King, gathered these together, and bade to write many of these that our forefathers held, those that to me seemed good: and many of those that seemed not good I set aside with my witan's council, and in other wise bade to hold them; for that I durst not venture much of mine own to set in writing, for that it was unknown to me what of this would be acceptable to those that came after us. But those that I met with, either in my kinsman Ina's days, or in Offa's, king of Mercia, or in Ethel-

bryte's, that first of the English race took baptism, those that seemed to me the rightest I gathered them herein, and let the others alone. I then, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, showed these to all my witan, and they then said that they all seemed good to them to hold."

Then follow the collected dooms, approved by Alfred and his witan, from other sources, and "Ina's dooms" by themselves, at the end of the code. We have only room for a few of those which best illustrate the habits and society of the time.

OF OATHS AND OF PLEDGES.

"It is most needful that every man warily hold his oath and his pledge. If any man is forced to either of these in wrong, either to treachery against a lord, or other unright help, it is better to belie than to fulfil. If he, however, pledge what it is right for him to fulfil, and belie that, let him give with lowly-mindedness his weapon and his goods to his friends to hold, and be forty nights in prison in a king's town, and suffer there as the bishop assigns him; and let his kinsmen feed him if he himself have no meat. If he have no kinsmen, or no food, let the king's reeve feed him. If one should compel him, and he else will not, if they bind him let him forfeit his weapons and inheritance. If one slay him, let him lye without amends. If he flee out ere the time, and one take him, let him be forty nights in prison, as he should at first. If, however, he escape, let him be looked on as a runaway, and be excommunicate

of all Christ's churches. If, however, another man be his surety, let him make boot for the breach of suretyship as the law may direct, and for the pledge-breaking as his confessor may shrive him."

It is in this doom that imprisonment is first mentioned in the Saxon laws. The doom for treason to which Alfred refers in his preface as the unpardonable sin, and which in fact modifies that startling assertion, is,

OF TREACHERY AGAINST A LORD.

"If any one is treacherous about the king's life by himself, or by protecting outlaws, or their men, be he liable in his life, and in all that he owns. If he will prove himself true, let him do it by the king's were-gild. In like manner we also appoint for all ranks, both churl and earl. He that is treacherous about his lord's life, be he liable in his life and all that he owns, or by his lord's were prove him true."

Sanctuary in churches is carefully regulated, and "church-frith" established; that is to say, if a man seek sanctuary for any crime which has not come to light, and confess it in God's name, "be it half forgiven."

The settlement of the boot for offences against women form a prominent part of the code. From one of these dooms (8) it would seem that a nun might be married with the leave of the king or the bishop, as a fine of 120 shillings (half to go to the king, and half to the bishop and the lord of the convent) is inflicted for taking her without such leave.

The care which our forefathers took to enforce the responsibility of the several sections of society for their individual members, may be well illustrated by the dooms as to "kinless men." "If a man kinless of father's kin fight, and slay a man, then if he have mother's kin, let them find a third of the were, his guild brethren a third, and for a third let him flee. If he have no mother's kin, let his guild brethren pay half, and for half let him flee. If a man slay a kinless man, let half his were be paid to the king, half to his guild brethren."

The scale by which the different classes of society were assessed may be gathered from the doom for housebreaking (40), by which burglary in the king's house is fixed at one hundred and twenty shillings, in an archbishop's ninety shillings, a bishop's or alderman's sixty shillings, a twelve hynde man's thirty shillings, a six hynde man's fifteen shillings, a churl's five shillings; the boot being in each instance double if the offence is committed "while the army is out," or during Lent. In laws of earlier date the same penalties had been fixed for offences against the king and against bishops. Now the king has established his supremacy in every way.

It has been said that Alfred and his witan first established a system of entail in England. There is no foundation for this statement except the doom, that if a man have inherited book-land "he must not give it from his kin, if there be writing or witness that it was forbidden by those that first gained it;" a somewhat slender ground for the theory.

But the strangest glimpse which we get through these laws of the state of society of a thousand years since is in the doom as to feuds. It is too long to quote, but in substance amounts to this: a man who has a feud with another may not fight him, if he finds him at home, without first demanding right of him; even then, he may not fight him for seven days if he will remain within. If he come upon him abroad unawares, he may fight him if he will not give up his weapons; if he will, then he must "hold him thirty nights and warn his friends of him" (probably that they may ransom him, but this is not stated). A man may fight for his lord, and a lord for his man, without feud. He may also fight for his born kinsman without feud, except against his lord, "that we allow not." He may also without feud fight any man whom he finds insulting his wife, daughter, sister, or mother.

Holidays, or Massday Festivals, are provided for all freemen; twelve days at Yule, "and the day that Christ overcame the devil, and St. Gregory's day (probably because of Alfred's reverence for Pope Gregory), and a fortnight at Easter, St. Peter's and St. Paul's days," in harvest the full week before St. Mary's mass, All-Hallows day, and four Wednesdays in the four Ember Weeks. Serfs or "theow men," however, do not fare so well, being left to "whatever any man give them for God's name."

No less than thirty-three dooms are given up to the valuing of wounds of all kinds, the boots ranging from two shillings for a finger-nail, to eighty shillings

for an arm, and one hundred shillings for the tendons of the neck. A man guilty of slander shall lose his tongue, or pay full were-gild.

Amongst the dooms of "Ina my kinsman," which are appended to Alfred's, we may note that as to working on Sundays. If a theow work on Sunday by his lord's order, the lord must pay thirty shillings for wite; if without his lord's order, "let him pay hide gild," or, in other words, be flogged. If a free-man work without his lord's order, he must forfeit his freedom, or pay sixty shillings, and a priest must forfeit double.

A chance of escape is left, however, for the theow who has become liable to "hide gild" under the doom on "Church scots:" "If any man forfeit his hide and run into a church, let the swingeing (whipping) be forgiven him."

For the protection of forests it is enacted, that if any man burn a tree in a wood and it be found out, "let him pay full wite of sixty shillings, *because fire is a thief;*" but, if any one fell many trees in a wood, "let him pay for three trees, each with thirty shillings. He need not pay for more of them, however many there might be, because *the axe is an informer, not a thief.* But if any one cut down a tree under which thirty swine may stand, let him pay sixty shillings wite."

The doom against lurking in secret places, already noticed, is re-enacted in a modified form: if any far-coming man, or stranger, journey through a wood out of the highway, and neither shout nor blow horn, he may be slain.

By such dooms, then, did the King and his witan endeavour to weld into the everyday life of a rude people, accustomed to settle all disputes and difficulties by free fighting, that one governing doom of the whole code, "That ye will that other men do not to you, do ye not that to other men." It may be impossible to suppress a smile at the strange company in which the golden rule finds itself in the code of Alfred and his wise men. The task was by no means an easy one, and they have, at any rate, the credit of putting it distinctly forward and doing their best upon it. Have any of our law-makers from that time to this aimed at a higher ideal, or worked it out more honestly according to their lights? If so, let them cast the first stone at "Alfred's dooms."

Mr. Thorpe supposes that the same code, with the dooms of Offa, instead of those of Ina, appended, was passed by the witan of Mercia, and put in force in that country. The code was also modified for the new Danish kingdom of East Anglia.

CHAPTER XV.

THE KING'S JUSTICE.

'And he set judges in the land, throughout all the fenced cities, city by city, and said to them, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, and He is with you in the judgment."

THE one special characteristic of Englishmen (indubitable and indisputable till of late), reverence for law and the constable's staff, if it had ever taken root at all in the country before Alfred's time, had disappeared during the life-and-death struggle with the Northmen. When "the army" left Mercia, and went to settle in their own country, the state of things which they left behind them in Wessex was lawless to the last degree. The severe penalties provided in Alfred's laws for brawling in the king's hall, or before aldermen in the mote, for disturbing the folk-mote by weapon drawing, for fighting in the houses of freemen or churls, show what a pass things had come to.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that this readiness to appeal to the strong hand on all occasions was not altogether without justification, for the ordinary tribunals were fallen into utter disrepute, scarcely even attempting to do justice between man

and man. The aldermen of the shires, hereditary rulers, responsible indeed to the King, but for most practical purposes independent, were the chief judges, as well as the chief executive officers, of the kingdom. They had systematically neglected, and so had become utterly incompetent to fulfil, their judicial duties. There was scarcely an alderman who could read the text of the written laws in his own language, or who had any but the most superficial acquaintance with the common law, which was even then a precious inheritance of the tribes of the great German stock. These judicial duties had consequently fallen into the hands of their servants, "vice-domini," and other inferior officers. How these and others carried matters, and what sort of justice the people got under them, we may conjecture from the statement in Andrew Horne's "Miroir des Justices," that Alfred had to hang forty-four of them for scandalous conduct on the judgment-seat. One Cadwine was thus hanged, because on the trial of Hachwy for his life he first put himself on the jury, and then, when three of the jury were still for finding a verdict of not guilty, removed these and substituted three others, against whom he gave Hachwy no right of challenge, and sentenced him to death on their verdict. Another, Freberne, was hanged for sentencing Harpin to death when the jury were in doubt, and would not find a verdict of guilty; and Segnar, because he condemned Elfe to death after he had been acquitted. Dr. Pauli and others have doubted this evidence, deeming such measures absolutely inconsistent with Alfred's

character, and it is certainly difficult to believe that he would have so punished men for mistakes, as is the case with some of the forty-four cases cited in the "Miroir des Justices." But I own it seems to me that Cadwine and Freberne most thoroughly deserved hanging, and that Alfred was just the king to have given them their deserts. Unfortunately, the treatise which he is said to have written "against unjust Judges," and his "reports of cases in his time" (*acta magistratum suorum*), which were extant it seems in Edward IV.'s reign, are lost. We can get no nearer the truth, therefore, on this particular question, but have the best evidence as to the thorough reform which he introduced in the whole administration of justice.

The first and most important of his reforms was, the severance of the executive and judicial functions. But even this step was taken without haste, or injustice of any kind. It was only after patient sifting, and very gradually, that the aldermen and earls were superseded. The hard-handed, truculent, old warriors, who had stood so stoutly by him through many a hard day's fighting, were dear to the King, and were treated by him with the utmost consideration. He would give the chiefs who had led men at Ashdown, and Wilton, and Ethandune, every chance; would spend himself in the effort to make them equal to their duties; would allow them to do anything, except injustice to God's poor, and his. For, as Asser testifies, "he showed himself a minute investigator of the truth in all his judgments, and this especially

for the sake of the poor, to whose interests, day and night, among other duties of this life, he was ever wonderfully attentive. For in the whole kingdom the poor beside him had few or no protectors. For all the powerful and noble men of the nation had turned their thoughts to worldly rather than to heavenly things, and each was bent more on his own profit than on the public good."

There is, in the same author, a very characteristic account of Alfred's endeavour to educate his aldermen and earls as judges, which is for us full of humour, almost reaching pathos. Alfred, in all the early years of his reign, was in the habit of inquiring "into almost all the judgments which were given in his absence throughout all his realm, whether they were just or unjust. If he perceived there was iniquity in those judgments, he would summon the judges, either himself, or through his faithful servants, and ask them mildly why they had judged so unjustly—whether through ignorance or malevolence, whether for the love or fear of any, or hatred of others, or, also, for the desire for money." What happened in the latter case Asser does not tell us, but the "Miroir des Justices" may suggest. If, however, "the judges acknowledged that they had given such judgments because they knew no better, he would discreetly and moderately reprove their inexperience and folly in such words as these: 'I wonder, truly, at your rashness, that, whereas by God's favour and mine you have occupied the rank and office of the wise, you have neglected the studies and labours of the wise.



Sedulously bent on acquiring learning.—P. 177.

Either, therefore, at once give up the discharge of these duties which you hold, or endeavour more zealously to study the lessons of wisdom. Such are my commands.' At these words, the aldermen, earls, and prefects would tremble, and endeavour to turn all their thoughts to the study of justice; so that, wonderful to say, almost all his earls, prefects, and officers, though unlearned from their cradles, were sedulously bent on acquiring learning, choosing rather laboriously to acquire the knowledge of a new discipline than to resign their functions. But if any one of them, from old age or slowness of mind, were unable to make progress in liberal studies, the King commanded his son, if he had one, or one of his kinsmen, or, if there were no other person to be had, one of his own freedmen or servants whom he had before advanced to the office of reading, to recite Saxon books before him day and night, whenever he had any leisure. Then these men would lament, with deep sighs in their inmost hearts, that in their youth they had never attended to such studies, and would bless the young men of our days who happily could be instructed in the liberal arts, while they would execrate their own lot that they had not learned these things in their youth, and now, when they are old, though willing to learn them, they are unable."

The stout old warriors, "sedulously bent on acquiring learning," there in the England of a thousand years ago, with one of the King's young freedmen —a kind of pupil-teacher, not without a dash of

priggishness, we may fancy—reading to each of the most stolid of them, day and night, so that they can scarcely eat or sleep in peace! Before Bishop Asser, no doubt, they only "lamented with deep sighs," and "blessed the young men of our day!" Those who have ever attended one of the schools started near some great railway work in our time for the navigators, may get some idea of the toil of those ancient aldermen, earls, prefects, and officers of Alfred's. There is something very touching in the struggle of a great strong man over his primer, and the blotted pot-hooks which he slowly stumps out on a tormented copy-book with his huge, horny hand. The aldermen generally, let us hope, came soon to the conclusion that presiding in courts of justice was not their true function. In any case it seems certain that Alfred effectually separated the judicial and executive duties of his officers, and appointed a set of judges whose functions coincided to some extent with those of our judges of assize: officers who were sent through the shires to see that justice was being done, and to overhaul and report on the decisions of the county courts.

But when his new system had been established, a heavy burden still lay on the King. The old, disorderly habits were not to be shaken off at once. The suitors often "perversely quarrelled in the courts of his earls and officers, to such an extent that hardly any one of them would admit the justice of what had been decided by the earls and prefects, and, in consequence of this pertinacious and obstinate dissension, all desired to have the judgment of the King, and both sides strove

at once to gratify this desire." Thus it was in suits where both plaintiff and defendant believed in their own case. "But if any one was conscious of injustice on his side in a suit, though by law or agreement he were compelled to go before the King, yet with his own good-will he never would consent to go. For he knew that in the King's presence no part of his wrong would be hidden, and no wonder, for the King was a most acute investigator when appealed to to pass sentence, as he was in all other things."

But reform in his law courts was only a small portion of Alfred's work. The old framework of society had been rudely shaken, and nothing short of a thorough re-organization would restore peace and order, and give his new courts and officers a fair chance. Accordingly the King set to work on the same principle as had guided him in his law reforms. He has a strong conservative reverence for that which his forefathers have established, and will preserve it wherever possible. Thus he accepts the division of the kingdom into shires, which has sometimes been attributed to him, but which, it is certain, was much older than his day; but the boundaries of shires, hitherto uncertain, and varying from time to time, are now laid down precisely, after a general survey of the country, upon which it has been supposed that Domesday-book was founded. This survey was engrossed and kept at Winchester, and called the Roll of Winchester. By it the shires, and their subdivisions of hundreds or wapentakes, were carefully set out, much as they remain to this day, as territorial divisions.

Alfred gave each hundred its court, and there seems reason to believe that from this court of the hundred the first appeal lay to a court of the "trything," a district composed of several hundreds. There were generally, it is said, three trythings in every county, of which traces still remain in the three ridings of Yorkshire, the lathes of Kent, and the three districts of Lincolnshire, Lindesey, Kesteven, and Holland. The evidence, however, as to these "trythings" is weak, and does not affect any shire in Wessex proper, the old West Saxon kingdom. The hundreds again he subdivided into tythings, each of which was represented by a head-borough, or chief man of the tything.

Every English householder then who claimed to be a "liege man," or one who was living according to law, was a member of a tything, and of a hundred, if living in the country, or of a guild if living in a town: and householders had to keep "household rolls" of their servants. Thus, in one way or another, every man was recognised, caught hold of by the law, and taught his duties and obligations as a citizen. If there were a man who belonged to no hundred, tything, or guild, and whose name was on no household roll, he, it seems, would be held an outlaw and common enemy, whose life and goods were at the mercy of any one who chose to take them, or, in the expressive phrase of the time, he "wore the wolf's head."

Under this framework of hundreds and tythings a stringent system of suretyship was established. Thus if a crime were committed within a tything, the head-

borough had to undertake at once for the production of the criminal. If he escaped, the tything had a certain number of days given them, within which he must be produced for trial. If they could not produce him, the tything had yet a way of clearing themselves. If the head-borough and two "chief pledges," or leading men of the tything in which the offence had been committed, could get the head-borough and two chief pledges of the three neighbouring tythings —twelve good men in all—to join with them in swearing that, in their conscience, the tything was innocent of any knowledge of, or privity with, the crime or the flight, the society was cleared. Otherwise the tything had to pay the fine awarded by law for the offence. This might be levied in the first instance on the goods of the culprit, but, on failure of these, the balance had to be made up by a levy on the whole tything. Besides this, every member of the tything had to clear himself by oath of any privity with the fault or flight, and to swear that he would bring the culprit to trial whenever he could find him.

The liability of a householder to answer for any stranger who might stop at his house has already been noticed. If such a stranger, merchant, or wayfaring man, came to be suspected of any crime and could not be found, he whose guest he had last been was summoned to account for him. If he had not entertained the stranger for more than two nights, he might clear himself by oath; but if the stranger had lodged with him three nights, he was bound to pro-

duce him, or answer, and pay "weregild," or "wite," for him, as for one of his own family.

This mutual liability, or suretyship, was the pivot of all Alfred's administrative reforms. It was an old system known by the common name of frank-pledge, but now new life was put into it by the King, and in a short time it worked a very remarkable change in the whole of his kingdom. Merchants and others could go about their affairs without guards of armed men. The forests were emptied of their outlaws, kinless men, and Danes, and left to the neat-herds and swine-herds and their charges. Confidence and security succeeded to the distrust and lawlessness which had threatened the realm with hopeless anarchy at the end of the great war. Later chroniclers, such as Ingulf and Malmesbury, have preserved the stories which the English people used fondly to tell of the state of their country in the time of their hero king: how virgins might travel without fear of insult from one end of England to the other; how if a wayfarer left his money all night on the highway, he might come next day and be sure of finding it untouched; how the King himself tried the experiment of hanging up gold bracelets at cross-roads, and no man wished, or dared, to lay hands on them. The like stories had been current in earlier times of King Edwin, and were also told of Normandy under the rule of Rollo in these same years. We need not attach any undue weight to them, but the fact remains on evidence, which has been allowed to be trustworthy by competent students of all schools, that

within the lives of one generation Alfred converted the West Saxons from a lawless, brawling race of semi-barbarians into a peaceable and law-abiding nation.

This frank-pledge system, which was worked in the country districts through the local divisions of tythings and hundreds, was worked in the towns by the machinery of the guilds. There is no more interesting piece of social history than this of the Saxon guilds, but it is quite beyond our province here to touch upon it. All we are concerned with is the guild amongst the West Saxons at this precise period. They were institutions combining the objects of benefit clubs, insurance societies, and trades-unions. As a rule they were limited to members of one trade or calling, or at least to members of the same class of society; for there were guilds of priests and thanes, as well as guilds of weavers and masons. The insurance extended to mutual support and maintenance during life, and to the costs of burial and of masses for the soul after death. This was the organization which the system of frank-pledge laid hold of, and probably developed, for the guilds in the times nearer the Norman conquest had extended so as sometimes to embrace all the citizens of a town in one society. Whatever the size of the guild might be, the king's officer, the town reeve, looked to the officers of the guild in his town, as the shire reeve looked to the head-borough of the tything in the county, for the production of offenders and the payment of were and wite. The political education of the whole people was thus

carried on in shire and town, though the right of every freeman to attend the Great Council had necessarily fallen into abeyance. The result is well summed up by Mr. Pearson:—

"What is essential to remember is, that life and property were not secured to the Anglo-Saxon by the State, but by the loyal union of his free fellow-citizens: that honour and courage were expected from neighbours, as readily as amongst ourselves from the police, and that free co-operation secured the weak from the strong, provided for the destitute and orphan, and mitigated the ruinous losses against which no care can provide. The system may have been—must have been—imperfect in its workings. But the question is not one merely of material results: it is rather of moral education, and I believe the Saxon guilds are unmatched in the history of their times, as evidences of self-reliance, of mutual trust, of patient self-restraint, and of orderly love of law among a young people."[1]

The laws or customs of frank-pledge, enforced by courts-leet in every hundred, were undoubtedly what are now called heroic remedies. That they interfered with the individual freedom of the subjects of the king in a very real sense it is impossible to deny, but it is equally true that they did most effectually the work which they were meant to do, which I take

[1] Pearson's "History of England during Early and Middle Ages," vol. i. p. 276. I am glad to take this opportunity of again owning my great obligations to this work. The chapters xvi. to xx. are quite invaluable studies of England and the English during the Anglo-Saxon period.

to be the real test of remedial measures, heroic or humdrum.

Sir John Spelman, looking round him at the confusions of the England of his day, mourns over the disuse of the courts-leet and the institution of frank-pledges, which used to be "the whole and sole administration of justice, criminal which was in the kingdom." "Had they been continued in practice," the old knight thinks, "according to their ancient usage, they had been to this day not unprofitable to the commonwealth. For instance, the continual trouble and contention that is daily raised between town and town about the settling of people chargeable, or feared to be chargeable; the universal complaint of the licentiousness and unruliness of servants, who (for the liberty they now have of changing at their pleasure) will stay in no place, nor serve, but upon such conditions as to work and wages as is grievous to masters, and gives trouble to all the justices in the kingdom to regulate; the pester and annoyance of the kingdom with such a surcharge of vagrant and disorderly persons, that more and more now-a-days abound, and many other such like inconveniences, had all been avoided or in great part remedied by the observance of the law of frank-pledge." Still he owns that, in a commonwealth so increased as it was in his day, it would be in vain to attempt to bring it back. In an age of electric telegraphs and railways it would seem at first sight scarcely worth while to dwell upon it at all. At the same time, unless the world is essentially different from the world in which Alfred lived

and reigned, and men and women are neither the children of, or kin to, the men and women over whom he ruled—which we have no reason for believing—there must be something answering, or analogous, to this custom or institution of frank-pledge, which we might be all the better for getting at. Alfred had his problems of anarchy, widespread lawlessness, terrorism, to meet. After the best thought he could give to the business, he met them just thus, and prevailed. Like diseases call for like cures; and we may assume without fear that a remedy which has been very successful in one age is at least worth looking at in another.

We too, like Alfred, have our own troubles—our land-questions, labour-questions, steady increase of pauperism, and others. In our struggle for life we fight with different weapons, and have our advantages of one kind or another over our ancestors; but when all is said and done there is scarcely more coherence in the English nation of 1869, than in that of 1079. Individualism, no doubt, has its noble side; and "every man for himself" is a law which works wonders; but we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that under their action English life has become more and more disjointed, threatening in some directions altogether to fall to pieces. What we specially want is something which shall bind us more closely together. Every nation of Christendom is feeling after the same thing. The need of getting done in some form that which frank-pledge did for Alfred's people expresses itself in Germany in mutual-credit banks, open to every honest citizen; in France, in the

productive associations of all kinds; at home in our co-operative movement, and trades-unions.

No mere machinery, nothing that governments or legislatures can do in our day, will be of much help, but they may be great hindrances. The study of the modern statesman must be how to give such movements full scope and a fair chance, so that the people may be able without let or hindrance to work out in their own way the principle which Alfred brought practically home to his England, that in human society men cannot divest themselves of responsibility for their neighbours, and ought not to be allowed to attempt it.

To recapitulate, then, shortly—the reforms which the King effected in the administration of justice, and what we may fairly call the resettlement of the country, were almost all adaptations or developments of what he found when he came to the throne. The old divisions of shires were carefully readjusted and divided into hundreds and tythings. The alderman of the shire still remained the chief officer, but the office was no longer hereditary. The King appointed the alderman, or earl, of the shire, who was called the "king's alderman," or "comes." He was president of the shire gemot, or council, and chief judge of the county court, as well as governor of the shire, but was assisted, and probably controlled, in his judicial capacity, by justices appointed by the King, and not attached to the shire or in any way dependent on the alderman. The officers called in the Chronicles "vice-domini," who

had come to be simply the servants and nominees of the alderman, exercising indifferently judicial and executive functions, were abolished, and one officer substituted for them, the reeve of the shire, or sheriff. The sheriff was the king's officer, who carried out the decrees of the courts, levied the were-gild and other fines, and had generally the duty of seeing that the king's justice was promptly and properly executed; but had no judicial functions whatever. The hundreds and tythings were represented by their own officers, and had their own hundred-courts, and courts-leet. These courts seem to have had some trifling criminal jurisdiction, but were chiefly assemblies answering more to our grand juries, and parish vestries. All householders were members of them, and every man thus became directly responsible for keeping the king's peace. Through their officers — "head-boroughs," "borsholders," or by whatever other name they went — offenders were apprehended, fines levied, the army recruited; in short, the whole civil business of the country transacted. A simple but effective organization for a commonwealth in the condition of the England of the ninth century, as was abundantly proved by the immediate results. The fact that much of it remains to our own day shows that it had worth in it for other and different times.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE KING'S EXCHEQUER.

"*He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand, but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

"*Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.*

"*The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.*"

OF all the difficult questions which meet the student of King Alfred's life and times, there is none more puzzling than this of his exchequer. We have already passed in review a portion of the work which he managed to perform, and much yet remains for us to glance at. We know that he rebuilt the fortresses, created a navy composed of ships of a more costly kind than had yet been in use, and re-organized his army so as constantly to have one-third of the freemen capable of carrying arms ready for immediate service, and on full pay. Our own experience tells us that these are three as costly undertakings as any which a reforming king could take in hand. Where then did the necessary funds come from?

The rebuilding of fortresses, and marching against an enemy in the field, were indeed, as we have seen,

two of the three duties to which all land granted to individuals was subject; but this rule would scarcely seem to have included such fortresses as were royal property. These, which were undoubtedly very numerous, the King probably rebuilt at his own charges. In the same way, the military service which freemen were bound to render did not include garrison duty, or the three months' yearly training under arms, which Alfred enforced after the first great invasion of Wessex. The reconstruction of the fleet, too, was an unusual expense, which must probably have fallen on the King almost exclusively. Mr. Pearson says, "The church, the army, the fleet, the police, the poor-rates, the walls, bridges, and highways of the country, were all local expenses, defrayed by tithes, by personal service, or by contributions among the guilds." But this statement can scarcely refer to so early a time as the ninth century; and Alfred's own words, and the last and most authentic portion of Asser's life, lead to the inference that much of the military cost of all kinds was borne by the King himself. To the outlay for these purposes, we must add the maintenance of his court, in a style of magnificence quite unusual before his time; the payment of the army of skilled artificers which he collected, and of his civil officers and ministers; the entertainment of strangers; his foreign embassies; his schools, the ecclesiastical establishments which he founded, endowed, or assisted; and the relief of the poor. These must have amounted to very large sums annually; while we should have expected that the sources of the King's wealth would have been

almost dried up by the long and devastating wars. Alfred indeed himself states, in the preamble to his will, that he and his family had been despoiled of great part of their wealth "by the heathen folk." The fact, however, remains, that all these things were done out of the King's revenues, and there is no hint in chronicler, or law, or charter, that he ever oppressed his people by any such exactions, legal or illegal, as have generally been enforced by magnificent monarchs, from Solomon downwards.

To meet this expenditure, the King's income was derived from three sources: public revenue, crown lands, and his private property. The public revenue arose from several sources, amongst which we may reckon probably dues in the nature of customs, payable by merchants at the several ports of the kingdom, and tolls payable by persons trading at the king's markets, though the authentic notices of the payment of any such in Alfred's time are very meagre. Then the king succeeded to the lands of those who died kinless, and probably to their goods if they were intestate. Treasure-trove also belonged to him. But far more important than these must have been the revenue derived from the were-gild, and other fines imposed by the laws for damage to person and property.

The care with which these "boots" are fixed in Alfred's laws, in which the details of the compensations awarded in such cases occupy the greater part of the code, would indicate the revenue from them to have been considerable. It will have been largest too

at the time when it was most needed, in the first years of peace, before the old violent habits of the people had given way under the even and strong administration of the King. But even of this revenue the King only got a portion. For instance, the were-gild or compensation for manslaughter was (it seems) divisible into three portions: the first part only, or "frith-boot," was paid to the King for the breach of his peace; the second part, or "man-boot," went to the lord as compensation for the loss of his man; where the dead man had no lord, or was a foreigner, two-thirds went to the King: the third part, called "mag" (or tribe) boot, or "ern gild" was paid to the dead man's family, as compensation for the injury caused to them by his loss. Of the remaining boots, it is probable that the King got a less share of those inflicted for injuries to the person not ending fatally, as the claim of the sufferer in such cases would be paramount to any other; while of those inflicted for such offences as perjury, slander, brawling, he would probably take the greater part. Still, on the most extravagant estimate, the income arising from all these sources must have been very trifling when compared with the royal outgoings.

The crown lands proper were no doubt of considerable extent and value, but there is little evidence to show of what they consisted. Reading, Dene, and Leonaford, are royal burghs mentioned in the Chronicles which are not included amongst Alfred's devises, and were probably crown lands. Alfred's own lands or family estates, of which he was absolute

owner, and able to dispose by his will, must have been very extensive. He had estates in every shire in Wessex, except that portion of Glostershire which was included in the old West Saxon kingdom. Perhaps, however, at the date of his will the whole of Glostershire might have been handed over to Ethelred the Alderman of Mercia, and the royal estates there given as part of Ethelswitha's dower. The royal properties lay most thickly in Wilts, Hants, and Somerset, in which three shires we find upwards of twenty specified in the will. Lands in Kent and Sussex are also devised, so that there was no part of the new kingdom in which Alfred was not a large proprietor. But how these lands were cultivated, what part of the produce was sold, and what forwarded in kind to meet the consumption of the court, and of that host of soldiers and mechanics for whom the King undertook to find bread and meat and beer, as one of the most important of his royal functions, there is no evidence to show.

But if we can do little but conjecture more or less confidently as to the sources or amount of Alfred's revenue, we know in remarkable detail how he spent it, from the account given in what Dr. Pauli and others consider the most authentic part of Asser's life.

The good bishop's preamble to this portion of his work tells how the King, after the building and endowing of his monasteries at Athelney and Shaftesbury, began to consider "what more he could do to augment and show forth his piety. That which he had begun wisely, and thoughtfully conceived for

the public good, he adhered to with equally beneficial result, for he had heard it out of the book of the law that the Lord had promised to restore him tenfold, and he knew that the Lord had kept His promise, and had actually restored him tenfold. Encouraged by which example, and wishing to outdo his predecessors in such matters, he vowed humbly and faithfully to devote to God half his services both day and night, and also half of all his wealth, such as lawfully and justly came annually into his possession. And this vow, as far as human judgment can discern, he skilfully and wisely endeavoured to fulfil. But that he might, with his usual caution, avoid that which Scripture warns us against, 'if you offer aright, but do not divide aright, you sin,' he considered how he might divide aright that which he had vowed to God; and as Solomon had said, 'the heart or counsel of the king is in the hand of God,' he ordered with wise foresight, which could come only from above, that his officers should first divide into two parts the revenues of every year. When this division was made he assigned the first half to worldly uses, and ordered that one-third of it should be paid to his soldiers, and also to his ministers and nobles who dwelt at court, where they discharged divers duties; for so the King's household was arranged at all times into three classes. His attendants were thus wisely divided into three companies, so that the first company should be on duty at court for one month, night and day, at the end of which time they returned to their homes and were relieved by the second company. At the

end of the second month, in the same way, the third company relieved the second, who returned to their homes, where they spent two months, until their turn for service came again. The third company also gave place to the first, in the same way, and also spent two months at home. Thus was the threefold division of the companies arranged at all times in the royal household. To these, therefore, was paid the first of the three portions, to each according to their respective dignities and services; the second to the workmen whom he had collected from every nation, and had about him in large numbers, men skilled in every kind of construction; the third portion was assigned to foreigners, who came to him out of every nation far and near; whether they asked money of him or not he cheerfully gave to each with wonderful munificence, according to their respective merits, as it is written, 'God loveth a cheerful giver.'"

"But the second part of his revenues, which came yearly into his possession, and was included in the receipts of the exchequer, as we mentioned above, he gave with ready devotion to God, ordering his ministers to divide it carefully into four parts. The first part was discreetly bestowed on the poor of every nation that came to him, and on this subject he said that, as far as human judgment could guarantee, the advice of Pope Gregory should be followed, 'Give not much to whom you should give little, nor little to whom much, nor something to whom nothing, nor nothing to whom something.' The second of the four portions was given to the two monasteries which

he had built, and to those who therein dedicated themselves to God's service. The third portion was assigned to the schools which he had studiously collected together, consisting of many of the nobility of his own nation. The fourth portion was for the use of all the neighbouring monasteries in all Saxony and Mercia, and also during some years, in turn, to the churches and servants of God dwelling in Britain, Cornwall, Gaul, Armorica, Northumbria, and sometimes also in Ireland; according to his means he either distributed to them beforehand, or afterwards, if life and success should not fail him," meaning, probably, that the King, when he was in funds, made his donations to monasteries at the beginning of the financial year—if otherwise, at the end.

The roundabout way in which the old churchman and scholar thus puts before us the picture of his truth-loving friend and king, preaching economy and order to his people by example, brings it home to us better than any modern paraphrase. Asser sees the good work going on under his eyes, the orderly and wise munificence, and the well-regulated industry of the King's household, giving tone to all the households in the realm; nobles and king's thegns, justices, officers, and soldiers, coming up month by month, and returning to their own shires, wiser and braver and thriftier men for their contact with the wisest and bravest and thriftiest Englishman. Everything prospers with him; for all his outlay, Asser sees and writes: "the Lord has restored him tenfold."

Rulers and workers the like of this king are indeed

apt to get large returns. The things of this world acknowledge their master, and pour into his lap full measure, heaped up, and running over. But the tenfold return brings its own danger with it, and too often the visible things bind the strong man. "This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail. . . . When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof saving the beholding of them with their eyes. . . . All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. . . There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men. A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease." So mourns the wise king who has bowed before the "tenfold return," and for whom his wealth has become a mere dreary burden.

If we would learn how the Saxon king kept the dominion which the Hebrew king lost over the things which "the Lord was restoring him tenfold," we shall perhaps get the key best from himself. "Lord," Alfred writes in his Anglo-Saxon adaptation from St. Augustine's "Blossom Gatherings," "Thou who hast wrought all things worthy, and nothing unworthy . . . to Thee I call, whom everything loveth that can love, both those which know what they love, and those which know not what they love: Thou who art the Father of that Son who has awakened and yet wakens us from the sleep of our sins, and warneth us that we

come to Thee. For every one falls who flees from Thee, and every one rises who turns to Thee, and every one stands who abides in Thee, and he dies who altogether forsakes Thee, and he quickens who comes to Thee, and he lives indeed who thoroughly abides in Thee. Thou who hast given us the power that we should not despond in any toil, nor in any inconvenience, as is no wonder, for Thou well rulest, and makest us well serve Thee. . . . Thou hast well taught us that we may understand that that was strange to us and transitory which we looked on as our own—that is, worldly wealth; and Thou hast also taught us to understand that that is our own which we looked on as strange to us—that is, the kingdom of heaven, which we before disregarded. Thou who hast taught us that we should do nought unlawful, hast also taught that we should not sorrow though our substance waned to us. . . . Thou hast loosed us from the thraldom of other creatures, and always preparest eternal life for us, and preparest us also for eternal life. . . . Hear me, Lord, Thy servant! Thee alone I love over all other things! Thee I seek!. Thee I follow! Thee I am ready to serve! Under Thy government I wish to abide, for Thou alone reignest."

A strange, incomprehensible, even exasperating kind of man, this king, to the temper and understanding of our day, which resents vehemently the expression of any such faith as his. How often during the last few years have we not heard impatient or contemptuous protests against the well-meaning perhaps, but shallow, and often vulgar, persons who are ashamed

or afraid of doubt, and insist on using this sort of precise language about matters which will not bear it, of which nothing certain is, or can be, known. But they are for the most part poor creatures (when not parsons, and therefore tied to their professional shibboleths), fools or bigots, useless for this world and in their relations with visible things, where we can test them, whatever they may be as to any other, of which neither they or we can know anything. Do any of our best intellects, statesmen, scholars, scientific men —any of those who lead the thought and do the work of our time—talk thus?

But this straightforward, practical English king, the hardest worker probably who ever lived in these islands, who was the first statesman, scholar, scientific man, of his day—who fought more pitched battles than he lived years, and triumphed over the most formidable leaders Europe could produce in those wild times—who re-organized, and put new life into, every institution of his country, and yet attended to every detail of business like a common merchant—is precisely the man who ought to have been free from this kind of superstition. It is a hard saying in the mouth of such a ruler of men, this of "Under Thy government I wish to abide, for Thou alone reignest." This can scarcely refer to the "tendency by which all men strive to fulfil the law of their being." What does it mean?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE KING'S CHURCH.

"Is not the Lord your God with you? and hath He not given you rest on every side? Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God: arise, therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God."

"By the end of the seventh century," says Mr. Freeman, "the independent insular Teutonic Church had become one of the brightest lights of the Christian firmament." The sad change which had come over her in the first half of the ninth century has already been noticed. She had entirely ceased to be a missionary church, and even in the matter of learning had so deteriorated, that Alfred himself writes in his preface to the Anglo-Saxon version of Gregory's Pastoral Care: "So clean was learning now fallen off amongst the English race, that there were very few on this side the Humber who were able to understand their service in English, or even to turn a written letter from Latin into English, and I think that there were not many beyond the Humber. So few there were of them, that I cannot think of even one on the south of the Thames when I first took to the kingdom." At the same time Alfred also remembers that when he was young he had seen, "ere all within them was laid waste and burnt up, how the churches

throughout all the English race stood filled with treasures and books, also a great multitude of God's servants, though they knew very little use of those books, for that they could not understand anything of them."

At the time of which Alfred is writing, the beginning of his own reign, it would seem too that the class from which hitherto the superior clergy, the monks and canons of the cathedrals and abbeys, had been recruited, had ceased to supply a sufficient number to fill up vacancies. Their places were being filled by the parochial clergy, or mass priests, who were of a much lower class socially. For the monks, with the exception of foreigners (of whom there had always been some in every considerable monastic institution), were as a rule of the noble class, while the mass priests were taken from the class of ceorls, who were still indeed an independent yeomanry, and owners of their own land, but in other respects little removed from the servile class. That this lack of candidates for orders was felt before the first invasion appears from an incident which happened in the year 870, just before the first great invasion of Wessex and Alfred's accession, and consequently before any cathedral or abbey in Wessex had been plundered or burnt. In that year, Ceolnoth, Archbishop of Canterbury, died, and "King Ethelred and Alfred his brother took Ethelred, Bishop of Winchester, and appointed him Archbishop, because formerly he had been a monk of that same minster of Canterbury." Now in Ceolnoth's time there had in one year been a great mortality

in Canterbury amongst the monks, so that five only were left for the work of the Cathedral. He was obliged therefore to bring in some of "the priests of his vills, that they should help the few monks who survived to do Christ's service, because he could not so readily find monks who would of themselves do that service." Nevertheless Ceolnoth had been always anxious to get rid of the mass priests, and the chronicler reports him as having said, "So soon as God shall give peace to this land, either these priests shall be monks, or from elsewhere I will place within the minster as many monks as may do the service of themselves." The speech was more probably Ethelred's, who at any rate, as soon as he was established in the Archbishopric, took counsel how he might expel the clerks that were therein. This however he could not effect, "for that the land was much distressed by frequent battles, and there was warfare and sorrow all his time over England, so that the clerks remained with the monks," and he died in 888 without having accomplished his object.

This state of things was of course made far worse by the war. That which was now the West Saxon kingdom contained at least five dioceses, besides that of Canterbury; of these Winchester, Sherborne, Wells, were the chief, all of which had been traversed and plundered at one time or another. The material prosperity had followed the higher life of the Church, and there was as much need of restoring the mere outward framework of churches and monasteries, as that of city walls and fortifications.

To this the King turned his attention soon after the peace of Wedmore. We have heard already that of the half of his revenue which he dedicated to religious uses, one-fourth was expended on the two monasteries of his own foundation, and another fourth on the monasteries in Wessex and the other English kingdoms. The erection of these two monasteries was the first ecclesiastical work he took in hand. The one for monks was built at Athelney, in fulfilment of a vow which he had made there during his residence on the island. A bridge "laboriously constructed" was now thrown over the morass, at the western end of which was erected a strong tower of beautiful work, to guard the approach. The monastery and outbuildings occupied the whole island, and being built before the King had collected his army of artisans, was of wood, the church small, and supported on four strong pillars of wood, and surrounded by four smaller cells or chancels.

But it was easier to build the monastery than to fill it as the King would wish it filled. "At first," says Asser, "he had no one of his own nation, noble and free by birth, who was willing to enter the monastic life, except children, who could neither choose good or avoid evil, in consequence of their tender years. For during many previous years, the love of a monastic life had utterly decayed from that nation, as well as from many other nations, though many monasteries remained in the country. As yet no one directed the rule of that kind of life in a regular way, for what reason I cannot say, either from the invasions of foreigners, which took place so frequently both by

sea and land, or because that people abounded in riches of every kind, and so looked with contempt on the monastic life." Alfred was consequently at once driven abroad, not only for learned monks who were able to occupy high places, and to instruct those who should instruct his people in all kinds of learning, but even for the ordinary brethren. For Athelney he got as first Abbot, John, priest and monk, an old Saxon by birth, and soon after him, certain monks and deacons from beyond the sea. But the monastery filled so slowly, that the King was soon driven to procure "as many as he could of the Gallic nation." Of these, some were children, for whom as well as for natives a school was established at Athelney, and they were taught there. Asser himself had seen a youth of pagan birth who had been educated in the monastery, and was of great promise.

Alfred's second monastery was one for nuns, built by the eastern gate of the town of Shaftesbury. The first abbess was Ethelgiva, his second daughter, who must have been placed in that position while almost a child, unless, indeed, the monastery was not built till a much later period than Asser indicates. In any case, there seems to have been no difficulty in finding nuns amongst the Saxon nobles, for many noble ladies became bound by the rules of monastic life, and entered the convent at Shaftesbury with the King's daughter. Besides an original endowment of lands, these two foundations were permanently sustained by one-eighth part of the royal revenues.

One other monastery Alfred appears to have com-

menced at Winchester, called the new monastery, which was the latest and most magnificent of his ecclesiastical buildings. It was intended as his burial-place, but was not finished at the time of his death. The chapel was so near the cathedral church of Winchester, that the chanting of one choir could be heard in the other building, which seems to have caused much bitterness between the bishop and abbot and their respective staffs. To this may be attributed the hard terms imposed by the bishop on Edward the elder, Alfred's son and successor, who, being anxious to complete his father's work, and to add suitable offices to the new monastery, was charged by the bishop a mark of gold for every foot of land he was obliged to buy. These are Alfred's only ecclesiastical foundations, though he was a munificent benefactor of others, such as Sherborne and Durham cathedrals, and the abbeys of Glastonbury and Wilton, and appropriated one-eighth of his income for distribution to any that had need.

But the building, restoring, and maintaining the outer fabric of churches, monasteries, and abbeys, was only the easiest part of the King's work. The discipline and services of the Church, and the habits and manners of monks and priests, had fallen into lamentable confusion. To restore these, Alfred searched his own and neighbouring kingdoms, and gathered round him a band of learned and pious churchmen, of whom he was able to speak with honourable pride towards the end of his life: "It is unknown how long there may be so learned bishops

as, thank God, are now everywhere." We shall have to notice these friends of the King by themselves; here it is only necessary to say that they taught in the schools, translated books, restored Church discipline, presided in synods, all under the King's eye, and so restored the character of the Church of England, that once again "the clergy were zealous in learning and in teaching, and in all their sacred duties, and people came from foreign countries to seek instruction."

One of the first effects of this revival was to attract the notice and approval of the Pope Martinus, who, either in the year 882 or 883, sent an embassy to Alfred with presents, including "a part of the rood on which Christ suffered." The King in return, in 883, sent presents to the Pope by the hands of Sighelm and Athelstane, two of his nobles, who also presented the suit of their King and people, that the Saxon schools at Rome, which were supported by the bounty of his father Ethelwulf, and in the church attached to which Buhred, his unhappy brother-in-law, was buried, might be freed from all toll and tribute. Martinus granted the request, and died in the next year. But his death does not seem to have affected Alfred's relations with the head of the Church. In many subsequent years English embassies to Rome are mentioned, those, for instance, of Ethelhelm, Alderman of Wilts in 887, and Beocca in 888, with whom journeyed the widowed Ethelswitha, Alfred's sister, formerly the lady of Mercia, to make her grave with her husband. She never reached Rome, but died on the journey at Pavia. Indeed, the note in the Saxon Chronicle for the year

889, "in this year there was no journey to Rome, except that King Alfred sent two couriers with letters," would lead to the inference that an embassy was regularly sent in ordinary years to carry the offerings of the King and people to the shrine of St. Peter. Beyond this interchange of courtesies, however, and the annual gifts, it does not appear that the relations between the Pope and the English Church became at all more intimate in Alfred's time. In some respects, undoubtedly, he asserted his authority over the national Church, and his superiority to its highest ministers, more decidedly than any of his predecessors. In his laws, the second commandment was virtually restored to the Decalogue; the King's weregild was made higher than an archbishop's, reversing the older law: the fine for breaking the King's bail was five pounds' weight of coin; for breaking an archbishop's bail, three pounds only: for breaking into the King's house, 120 shillings; into an archbishop's, ninety. Again, the way in which the King addresses and employs his bishops, carrying them about with him, and using them as translators of the Scriptures, or of any other work which he desires to put within reach of his people, shows that he claimed them as his officers, and that they acknowledged his authority. It is said that he left all the sees of Wessex vacant for the last years of his reign, and only under the care of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and that the Pope did not even remonstrate with him, but on his death threatened his successor with excommunication unless they were filled up.

From this fact Spelman argues that Alfred's "life and ways were not pleasing to the fathers at Rome." But this statement does not rest on any trustworthy authority, and it seems far more probable that Alfred lived on excellent terms with contemporary popes. They, for their part, seem to have wisely followed the liberal policy indicated in Gregory's answers to Saint Augustine, and to have allowed the Church in the distant island to develop in its own way. On the other hand, the King evidently entertained, and expressed on all occasions, very real and deep reverence for the acknowledged head of the Church, and worked in such noble and perfect harmony with his own bishops, that no questions seem ever to have arisen in his reign which could bring the spiritual and temporal powers into collision. His own humble and earnest piety, and scrupulous observance of all the ordinances of the Church, united with extraordinary firmness and power of ruling men, no doubt contributed to this happy result.

And so State and Church worked in harmony side by side, exercising a concurrent jurisdiction of a very remarkable kind. Every crime was punishable both by the civil and spiritual tribunals. The King and witan, or the judge and jury, or homage (as the case might be), punished the offender for the damage he had done to his fellow-citizens, or to the commonwealth, by fines, or mutilation, or imprisonment. But the criminal was not thus fully discharged. The moral sin remained, with which the State did not profess to deal, but left it to the spiritual powers, aided by the

provisions of the code. Accordingly, for every crime there was also a penance, to be fixed by bishop or priest. In short, Alfred and his witan believed that sin might be rooted out by external sanctions, penalties affecting body and goods. The Church, they thought, was the proper authority, the power which could do this work for the commonwealth, and accordingly to the Church the duty was entrusted.

Looked at with the experience of another 1,000 years, the wonder is, not that the attempt did not succeed, but that it worked even for a generation or so without bringing the two powers into the fiercest conflict. The singleness of mind and heart, and earnestness of Alfred, must have inspired in great measure his aldermen, judges, bishops, all men in responsible offices. So he could put forth his ideal, simply and squarely, and expect all Englishmen to endeavour to realize that—with results even there and then of a very surprising kind. For through the mists of 1,000 years we do here actually see a people trying, in a somewhat rude and uncouth way, but still honestly, to found their daily life on the highest ideal they could hear of—on the divine law as they acknowledged it—of doing as they would be done by.

Rome was not the only or the most distant foreign Church to which Alfred sent embassies. He had made a vow, before the taking and rebuilding of London, that, if he should be successful in that undertaking, he would send gifts to the Christian churches in the far East, of which uncertain rumours and traditions still spoke throughout Christendom. The

apostles St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew had preached the Gospel in India and founded these churches, it was said, and it was to them that Alfred, in performance of his vow, despatched the same Sighelm and Athelstan who were the bearers of his gifts and letters to Pope Martinus. They would seem, indeed, to have gone on from Rome in the year 883, by what route we know not, or how long they were upon their mission, or how they sped, save only that they came back to their King, bringing greetings from those distant brethren, and gifts of precious stones and spices in return for his alms. These Alfred distributed amongst his cathedrals, in some of which they were preserved for centuries. Such was the first intercourse between England and the great empire which has since been committed to her in the East. St. Thomas' Christians are still to be found in Malabar and elsewhere.

Asser also mentions letters and presents sent by Abel, the patriarch of Jerusalem, to his king. It does not appear, however, that Alfred sent any embassy to the Holy Land. Dr. Pauli suggests that these gifts might have been brought to England by the survivor of three Scotch pilgrims, whose names a romantic legend connects with the English king. Dunstane, Macbeth, and Maclinman, were the three Christians in question, who, despairing, it would seem, of the Church in their own country, put to sea in a frail boat, patched together with ox-hides and carrying a week's provisions, and landed on the coast of Cornwall. From thence they made their way to Alfred's

court, and were hospitably entertained by him, as his wont was, and forwarded on their journey, from which one of them only returned.

Asser speaks also, in general language, of daily embassies sent to the King by foreign nations, "from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the farthest end of Ireland." Of these, however, we have no certain account, but enough remains to show how the spirit of Alfred yearned for intercourse with Christians in all parts of the known world, and how the fame of his righteous government, and of his restored Church, was going forth, in these years of peace, to the ends of the earth.

But the greatest work of that Church, as of all true churches, was the education of the people at home. Besides the schools attached to his foundations of Athelney and Winchester, Alfred established many schools for the laity in different parts of his kingdom. One was attached to the court, and in it the children of his nobles, ministers, and friends were educated with his own children, and "were loved by him with wonderful affection, being no less dear to him than his own." They were educated carefully in good morals, and in the study of their own language, the King himself constantly superintending, and taking part in the teaching. To use his own words, he was desirous "that all the free-born youth of his people who had the means should persevere in learning so long as they had no other duties to attend to, until they could read the English Scriptures with fluency, and such as desired to devote themselves to the service of the Church might be taught Latin."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KING'S FRIENDS.

"As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers: and what man the ruler of the city is, such are all they that dwell therein."

WE have already incidentally come across several of the statesmen and ecclesiastics who were singled out and employed by Alfred, and must now endeavour to make some closer acquaintance with the men through whom the great reform of the English nation was wrought out under the great king. Unfortunately, the memorials of them are scanty, for they were a set of notable workers, worthy of all honour, and of the attentive and respectful regard even of the nineteenth century. They were of all races whom the King could get at, and of all ranks. Prince, noble, or peasant, rough skipper, or studious monk, or cunning craftsman, it was the same to him. The man who could do his work, this was all he cared for, and, when he had found him, set him forthwith to do it, with whatever promotion, precedence, or other material support might best help him.

John, the old Saxon, sometimes called John of Corvey, priest and monk, a stern disciplinarian and courageous person, we have already heard of as first

Abbot of Athelney, having also the superintendence of the theological school attached to the King's monastery there. Alfred himself has studied under him, and so has come to discern the man's faculty. For he was the King's mass-priest while Athelney was building, and helped him in the translation of "The Hinds' Book" (Gregory's pastoral) into the English tongue. Abbot John had a difficult, even a perilous time of it there, in the little island, remote from men, hemmed in by swamp and forest, where his monks have no orchards or gardens to till, and his boys no playground. The King's piety, and love of his place of refuge, have for once outweighed his sagacity, or he had not chosen the island for such purposes. Englishmen cannot be got to live there, and the Franks and others are jealous of their abbot. Brooding over it in that solitude, at last a priest and deacon and two monks, all Franks, plot his murder. John the Abbot goes constantly at midnight to pray before the high altar by himself. So the plotters bribe two foreign serving-men to hide in the church armed, and there slay him; after which they were to drag out the body, and cast it before the house of a certain woman of evil repute. The men on the night appointed accordingly rushed on the old man as he was kneeling before the altar. But he, hearing their approach, "being a man of brave mind, and as we have heard not unacquainted with the art of self-defence, if he had not been the follower of a better calling," rose up before he was wounded, and strove with them, shouting out that they were devils. The monks, alarmed by the

cries, rush in in time to carry their abbot off badly wounded, the conspirators mingling their tears with those of the other monks. In the confusion the assassins escape for the moment, but in the end all those concerned were taken and put in prison, "where by various tortures they came to a disgraceful end."

Nothing more is known of Abbot John's troubles or successes, and we may hope that he got his monastery and school into working order, and lived peaceably there for the rest of his days.

When a boy, Alfred, travelling across France with his father, had become acquainted, amongst other eminent scholars, with Grimbald, a priest skilled in music, and learned in Holy Scripture, and in all doctrine and discipline of the Church. He has risen since that time to the dignity of Provost of St. Omers, within the jurisdiction of Fulk, Archbishop of Rheims. To this prelate Alfred sends an embassy both of ecclesiastics and laymen, bearing presents, and praying that Grimbald may be allowed to come to England, to assist in building up and restoring the Church there. The answer is still extant. Addressing "the most Christian King of the English," Fulk, "Archbishop of Rheims and the servant of the servants of God," congratulates Alfred on the success of his temporal arms, and his zeal for enlarging the Church by spiritual weapons. The Archbishop prays incessantly that God will multiply peace to the King's realm in his days, and that the ecclesiastical orders ("which have, as ye say, in many ways fallen away, whether by the constant inroads of heathen men, or because the times are feeble by age,

or through the neglect of bishops, or ignorance of the inferior clergy") may by his diligence be reformed, ennobled, extended. The Archbishop acknowledges, has evidently been elated by, the King's desire to import doctrine and discipline from the seat of Saint Remigius, "which, we are constrained to boast, has always excelled in worship and doctrine all other French churches." Amongst other presents (for which grateful thanks) "ye have sent ūs noble and very staunch hounds, though carnal, for the controlling of those visible wolves, with great abundance of which, amongst other scourges, a just God has afflicted our land; asking of us in return hounds, not carnal but spiritual, not such, however, as those of which the prophet has said 'many dogs, not able to bark,' but such as shall know well how for their Lord to bay in earnest (*magnos latratus fundere*), to guard His flock with most vigilant watchfulness, and to drive far away those most cruel wolves of unclean spirits, who are the betrayers and devourers of souls. Out of such spiritual watchdogs ye have singled out and asked from us one of the name of Grimbald, priest and monk, to whom the universal Church bears record, she who has nourished him from his childhood in the true faith, advancing him after her manner to the dignity of the priesthood, and proclaiming him suited to the highest ecclesiastical honour, and well fitted to teach others. This same man has been a most faithful coadjutor to us, and we cannot without sore affliction suffer him to be parted from us by so vast a space of land and sea. But charity taketh no note of sacrifice,

nor faith of injury, nor can any earthly distance keep apart those whom the chain of a true affection joins. Wherefore we grant this request of yours most willingly." Such is the reply, much abridged, of the worthy Archbishop, evidently a Christian prelate with large leisure, some sense of humour, and a copious epistolary gift, who is impressed in his continental diocese with the vigour and greatness of his correspondent, and "desires that his royal state, piety, and valour may continue to rejoice and abound in Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords."

Grimbald, thus introduced, remains at first by Alfred's side as one of his mass-priests, assisting the King in his translations. Afterwards he becomes professor of divinity in one of the new schools, probably at Oxford, and then abbot of the new monastery at Winchester. There has been much learned controversy as to Grimbald's connexion with Oxford, in consequence of an interpolation in one of the early manuscripts of Asser's life, which purports to give an account of a violent quarrel which soon arose between Grimbald and the scholars whom he found there, and who refused to submit to the "laws, modes, and forms of prelection," which he desired to introduce. Their own, they maintained, had been established and approved by many learned and pious men, notably by St. Germanus, who had come to Oxford, and stopped there for half a year on his way to preach against the heresies of Pelagius. The strife ran so high that the King himself went to Oxford at Grimbald's summons, and "endured much

trouble" in hearing the arguments on both sides Having listened "with unheard of humility, the King exhorted them, with pious and wholesome admonition, to cherish mutual love and concord, and decided that each party should follow their own counsel and keep their own institutions." The whole story is probably the invention of a later century, when the claims of the two great universities to priority of foundation were warmly discussed. There is no proof that Oxford existed as a place of education before Alfred's time, nor is it certain that he founded schools there, though the "Annals of Winchester," and other ancient and respectable authorities, so assert, and that he built and endowed three colleges, "the greater hall, the lesser hall, and the little hall" of the university, of which halls University College is the lineal survivor. "Grimbald's crypt," however, may still be seen under the chancel of St. Peter's Church, the oldest in Oxford, and it seems more than probable that in some of the manuscripts of Asser's life, now lost, there was an account of the building of the original church on this site by Grimbald, and its consecration by the Bishop of Dorchester. The present church and crypt are undoubtedly of later date, but the tradition is strong enough to support the arguments of the learned. Those who are interested in the controversy will find it elaborately summed up in Sir J. Spelman's Third Book. In any case, it is certain that Alfred had a mint at Oxford, even if he founded no schools there.

Of English churchmen, Plegmund, Alfred's Archbishop of Canterbury, a Mercian by birth, is the most distinguished—said indeed to have been the first man of his time "in the science of holy learning." He escaped from the sack of his monastery at the time of the Danish invasion of Mercia, in 876, and lived as a hermit in an island four and a half miles from Chester for fourteen years, till sought out by Alfred and promoted to the primacy in 890, on the death of Archbishop Ethelred. It is more probable, however, that he was constantly with Alfred much earlier than this, for he is specially named as his instructor, and seldom quitted the Court till after his lord's death. He went, however, to Rome in 891 to be consecrated by Pope Formosus; and again a second time, after the body of Formosus had been disinterred and thrown into the Tiber by Stephen his successor, to be re-consecrated. He survived Alfred for twenty-three years, and seems to have ruled the English Church wisely, till his own death.

Another Mercian who was much consulted by Alfred, and who appears to have frequently visited him in Wessex, was Werfrith, Bishop of Worcester, to whom the King's celebrated preface to Gregory's "Pastoral Care" is addressed, and who, by Alfred's desire, translated the Dialogues of the same Pope into Saxon. He was the foremost helper of Alderman Ethelred and his wife, the Lady of Mercia, Ethelfleda, Alfred's daughter, and a vigorous organizer and governor of the things and persons of this world; ready, however, as a loyal son of holy Church to extend the

rights of the see of Worcester whenever opportunity might offer. A most characteristic instance of this instinct of Bishop Werfrith's occurs in the report of a sitting of the Mercian witan, first translated by Dr. Pauli from the Saxon. It is, in fact, the report of an important parliamentary debate of 1,000 years back, curious as a contrast to a Hansard's debate of to-day in more ways than one. It can scarcely be abridged without damage, and is as follows:—

"In the name of Christ our Lord and Saviour. After eight hundred and ninety-six years had passed since His birth, in the fourteenth Indiction, the Ealderman Ethelred summoned the Mercian witan, bishops, nobles, and all his forces, to appear at Gloster; and this he did with the knowledge and approbation of King Alfred. There they took counsel together how they might the most justly govern their community before God and the world, and many men, clergy as well as laity, consulted together respecting the lands, and many other matters which were laid before them. Then Bishop Werfrith spoke to the assembled witan, and declared that all forest land which belonged to Wuduceastre, and the revenues of which King Ethelbald once bestowed on Worcester for ever, should henceforth be held by Bishop Werfrith for wood and pasture; and he said that the revenue should be taken partly at Bislege, partly at Aefeningas, partly at Scorranstane, and partly at Thornbyrig, according as he chose. Then all the witan answered that the Church must make good her right as well as others. Then Ethelwald (Ealder-

man?) spoke: he would not oppose the right, the Bishops Aldberht and Alhun had already negotiated hereon, he would at all times grant to each church her allotted portion. So he benevolently yielded to the bishop's claim, and commanded his vassal Ecglaf to depart with Wulfhun, the priest of the place (Gloster?—properly, the inhabitant of the place). And he caused all the boundaries to be surveyed by them, as he read them in the old books, and as King Ethelbald had formerly marked them out and granted them. But Ethelwald still desired from the bishops and the diocese, that they should kindly allow him and his son Alhmund to enjoy the profits of the land for life; they would hold it only as a loan, and no one might deprive them of any of the rights of pasture, which were granted to him at Langanhrycgė at the time when God gave him the land. And Ethelwald declared that it would be always against God's favour for any one to possess it but the lord of that church to whom it had been relinquished, with the exception of Alhmund; and that he, during his life, would maintain the same friendly spirit of co-operation with the bishop. But if it ever happened that Alhmund should cease to recognise the agreement, or if he should be pronounced unworthy to keep the land, or thirdly, if his end should arrive, then the lord of the church should enter into possession, as the Mercian witan had decided at their assembly, and pointed out to him in the books. This took place with the concurrence of the Ealderman Ethelred, of Ethelfleda, of the Ealdermen Ethulf,

Ethelferth, and Alhhelm, of the Priests Ednoth, Elfræd, Werferth, and Ethelwald, of his own kinsmen, Ethelstan and Ethelhun, and likewise of Alhmund his own son. And so the priest of the place and Ethelwald's vassal rode over the land, first to Ginnethlæge and Roddimbeorg, then to Smececumb and Sengetlege, then to Heardanlege also called Dryganleg, and as far as Little Nægleslege and the land of Ethelferth. So Ethelwald's men pointed out to him the boundaries as they were defined and shown in the ancient books."

To Bishop Werfrith's zeal and ability it is most probably owing that the reaction towards paganism in Mercia, which followed the Danish occupation, made little progress. All traces of it seem to have disappeared before Alfred's death, when Central England had become as sound as Southern England.

The only native of Wessex who would seem to have won a place for himself in that little band of reforming churchmen was Denewulf, Bishop of Winchester, an honoured and faithful counsellor of the King, who is commonly supposed to be the neat-herd with whom Alfred became acquainted in 878, in Selwood Forest. If this be so, he could scarcely have been a wholly uneducated man even then, as Alfred required scholarship in his bishops, and Denewulf was consecrated before the end of 881. The story rests principally on the authority of the Chronicle of Florence of Worcester, compiled towards the end of the eleventh century.

But the friend of Alfred's of whom we know most is

Asser Menevensis, a Welsh monk, the author of the Life so often quoted; and who, during the last sixteen or seventeen years of his life, was the most intimate friend and adviser of the King. Somewhere about the year 884 Asser was either summoned by Alfred, or came of his own accord, from the monastery of St. David's, on "the furthest western coast of Wales," to the royal residence at Dene, in Sussex, where Alfred was then staying with his court. It would seem that the Welsh prince, Hemeid, who had sworn allegiance to Alfred to obtain protection against the six sons of Rotri, was in the habit of plundering the monastery, and had recently driven Novis, Archbishop of St. David's, Asser's kinsman, out of his diocese. Novis and his kinsman will no doubt have reasoned, that a king familiar with the parables would be wroth at such conduct in a fellow-servant: and that he who was so bent on establishing monasteries as schools and refuges for learning in his own kingdom, will not suffer this kind of doings by one whom he is protecting. Whether summoned or not, Asser was received with open arms by the King, who knew him for a learned and pious man, and at once admitted him to familiar intercourse. Soon the King began to press him earnestly to devote himself to his service, and to give up all he possessed on the west bank of the Severn, promising to recompense him amply in his own dominions. "I replied," Asser continues, "that I could not without thought, and rashly, promise such things, for it seemed to me wrong to leave those sacred places

where I had been bred and educated, and had received the tonsure and ordination, for the sake of any earthly honour or promotion. Upon this he said, 'If you cannot altogether accede to my request, at least let me have your service in part; spend six months of the year with me, and the other six in Wales.' I answered that I could not even promise this hastily, without the advice of my friends. But at length, when I saw that he was very anxious for my service (though I know not why), I promised that if my life were spared I would come back in six months with such a reply as would be welcome to him, as well as advantageous to me and my friends. With this answer he was content, and when I had given him a pledge to return at the appointed time, on the fourth day I left him, and returned on horseback towards my own country. After my departure I was stricken by a violent fever at Winchester, where I lay for a year and a week, night and day, without hope of recovery. At the appointed time, therefore, I could not redeem my pledge of returning to him, and he sent messengers to hasten my journey and ask the cause of the delay. As I was unable to ride to him I sent a messenger to tell him the cause of the delay, and to assure him that if I recovered I would fulfil what I had promised. So when my sickness left me, by the advice of all my friends, for the benefit of our holy place and of all who dwelt therein, I did as I had promised the King, and devoted myself to his service on condition that I should remain with him six months in every year, either continuously, if I could spend six months in

every year with him continuously, or alternately, three months in Wales, and three in England." Asser accordingly went to the court at Leonaford, where the King received him honourably, and he remained eight months, "during which I read to him whatever books he liked, and such as we had at hand; for this is his regular custom both night and day, amid his many other occupations of mind and body, either himself to read books or to listen while others read them." Asser, however, finds that the six months' compact is likely to be forgotten, and reminds the King of it frequently. "At length, when I had made up my mind to demand leave to go home, he called me to him at twilight, on Christmas eve, and gave me two documents in which was a long list of all the things which were in two monasteries, called in Saxon Angusbury and Banwell, and at that same time delivered to me those two monasteries with all those things which were in them, and a silken pall of great value, and a load of incense as much as a strong man could carry, adding that he did not give me these trifling presents because he was unwilling hereafter to give me greater; for in course of time he unexpectedly gave me Exeter, with all the church property which belonged to him there and in Cornwall, besides daily gifts without number, of every kind of worldly wealth, which it would be too long to recount lest I should weary my readers. But let no one suppose that I have mentioned these presents here for the sake of glory or flattery, or to obtain greater honour. I call God to witness that I have not done so, but that I

might testify to those who are ignorant how liberal he is in giving. He then at once gave me leave to ride to these monasteries, and then to return to my own country." So Asser was installed as a sort of bishop *in partibus* to his own countrymen in Cornwall. So at least we are driven to conjecture, for the see of Exeter was not constituted for another century, nor was he made Bishop of Sherborne till the death of Wulfsig in the year 900, though Alfred styles him bishop, and his name is attached to charters as bishop for many years before that date. We shall have to return to the good bishop's reminiscences when we treat of the King's private and literary life.

The other ecclesiastics who worked in that noble band of the King's helpers, such as Ethelstan and Werewulf of Mercia, are scarcely more than names to us, unless we except Joannes Erigena, or Scotus, an Irishman by birth, who is said by some to have taken refuge with the King. That Alfred when a boy had known John at the court of Charles the Bald, where he was tutor to Judith and her brothers, we have already heard, and may be sure that he would have been anxious to obtain the help of so eminent a scholar and thinker. Moreover, John the Scot, who has been called the father of the Realists, and had studied in the East and at Athens, may well have needed an asylum at this time. He had written works on the Eucharist, and on predestination, which had brought him into trouble with the authorities of the Church, and had not only refused to distinguish religion from philosophy, on the ground that both

had the same end—the search for truth; but had actually maintained that all authority is derived from reason, and that authority which is not confirmed by reason is of no value. At the same time his famous retort to Charles—who had asked him sitting at meat what separates a Scot and a sot (*quid interest inter Scotum et sotum*)—"the table only" (*mensa tantum*), may have made the French court an undesirable residence. Still, had he come to England, Asser had surely specially noticed him amongst Alfred's helpers and friends.

Of laymen a long list might be given, from Ethelred of Mercia, to Othere and Wulfstan, his sea captains, the account of whose voyages in the North Sea is interpolated by Alfred in his translation of Orosius. But beyond their names, and offices in the King's household, there is little to tell of them, though enough remains to witness to the truth of Asser's eloquent statement, that "he would avail himself of every opening to procure helpers in his great designs, to aid him in his strivings after wisdom; and like a prudent bird, which, rising in early morning from her loved nest, steers her swift flight through the uncertain tract of air, and descends on the manifold and varied flowers of grass, herb, and shrub, trying that which pleases most, that she may bear it to her home, so did he direct his eyes afar, and seek abroad that which he had not at home within his own kingdom."

At the same time, though he gathered round him competent men of all nations and all callings, wherever he could find them, Alfred was singu-

larly independent of them. He had no indispensable officers. The work which went on so busily during those years of peace, and was transforming the life of all southern England, was his own work. He was not only the inspirer, but in a very real sense the doer of it, and there is no name of bishop, soldier, or jurist, which can make good a claim to anything more than honour reflected from their great King. In all history it would be hard to find a more striking example of what one man may do for a nation in the course of a short lifetime.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE KING'S NEIGHBOURS.

"All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall do him service.
"For he shall deliver the poor when he crieth; the needy also, and him that hath no helper."

THE temptation to over-govern is apt to beset rulers who have the intense love of order, and genius for organizing, which distinguished Alfred. It is not easy for such men to recognise the worth of national or local habits and customs, or to resist the temptation of imposing their own laws and methods upon races which come under their influence, and Christendom has suffered grievously, and is still suffering, from such attempts to crush out national life. The surroundings of Alfred were precisely those most likely to have prompted such a policy. In the years of rest which followed the peace of Wedmore the West Saxon kingdom increased in wealth and power so rapidly as completely to overshadow its weaker neighbours. One after another they sought the protection of Alfred, and in no case was such protection refused, or any attempt made to fasten on them the West Saxon code of laws, or to supersede the native government.

The old enemies of the Saxons and Angles, the

Britons, who had been forced back into the Welsh mountains, had maintained their independence against such kings as Offa and Egbert. There had been constant wars on the marshes. Often defeated and invaded, the Celtic tribes had always closed up behind the retreating Saxon armies. They had refused all allegiance, and held little peaceable intercourse with their stronger neighbours. In the last of the Saxon invasions, King Ethelwulf had penetrated to the Isle of Anglesea, and humbled Rotri Mawr (the great Roderick), while Alfred was a child. In revenge, the Welsh had sympathised with and assisted the Dane, and had seriously added to the peril of the great struggle of his manhood.

Rotri Mawr had left six sons, turbulent men from their youth up, of whom the leader, probably the eldest, was Anarant, who had become the friend and ally of the Northumbrian Danes of Halfdene's army. The hand of these brethren was heavy on the other Welsh princes in those disturbed years. Hemeid, prince of Demetia, the disturber of the prelates and monastery of St. David's—to appeal against whose frequent plunderings Asser made his pilgrimage from that quiet sanctuary in "the extremest western coasts of Brittain"—was the first to open negotiations with Alfred. He and his people were driven to this appeal by the violence of their northern neighbours, the six sons of Rotri: so they submitted themselves to the dominion of the King, and obtained his protection. Then Helioed the son of Tendyr, the king or chief of the "Brecheinoc" Welsh, occupying the present

county of Brecknock and neighbouring districts of Central Wales, came in and made his submission, to protect his people from the same turbulent neighbours. Further south, Howell the son of Rhys, and Brochmail and Fernmail, the two sons of Mouric, who between them held rule over all the tribes inhabiting Morganwy and Gwent by the Severn, and whose country marched with that of Ethelred of Mercia, appealed from that energetic viceroy to King Alfred, and placed themselves under his protection. They accused the King's son-in-law of violence and tyranny; and we may readily understand that Ethelred's notions of government were of a kind which would be likely to bring about frequent collisions with his neighbours on the opposite bank of the Severn. All of these "gained the love and guardianship" of the great King of the West Saxons, "and defence from every quarter, even as the King with his men could protect himself." So at last Anarant, the son of Rotri, with his five brothers, finding that their occupation was gone, and that the shield of the great King was cast over all their brother princelings and their possessions, "abandoning the friendship of the Northumbrians, from which they had received harm only, came into King Alfred's presence and eagerly sought his friendship." This was at once accorded to them also. They were honourably entertained at court, and Anarant was "made Alfred's son by confirmation from the bishop's hands," and left for his own country loaded with many gifts. The same terms of allegiance were imposed on him as on Ethelred of

Mercia: and so, before the year 884, the whole of Wales was brought under Alfred's sway; the intertribal wars and plunderings ceased, and the country enjoyed peace, and the princes the friendship of their great neighbour, and his assistance in all ways in the improvement of their own people. Thus the old wounds were closed for the time, and the two nations settled down in unaccustomed peace, Celt and Saxon side by side, after upwards of four centuries of fierce and disastrous warfare. The peace was of short duration, but it lasted till after Alfred's death.

The near relationship between the people of the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex, and the old rivalry between their royal houses, must have made the task of establishing satisfactory relations between them, now that the supremacy of the latter had been thoroughly established, even more difficult than in the case of North Wales. The memories of Penda and Offa, of many battles won on West Saxon soil—even of tribute paid and allegiance owned—must still have been fresh in Mercia. But Buhred had left no children, and the most powerful of the Mercian nobles was devoted to Alfred. This was Ethelred, the earl of the Anglian tribe of Hwiccas, who were settled in the eastern parts of Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and had been the chief bulwark against the Welsh. We do not know anything of his earlier history, and cannot conjecture therefore how so brave and able a man, at the head of a tribe inured to the constant warfare of the

marches, made no head against Guthrum and the pagan army at the time of the Danish occupation of Mercia. At any rate he had not forfeited the confidence and goodwill of Alfred, for in the year 880, the same in which the Danes finally left their camp at Cirencester and retired into East Anglia, Ethelred was appointed alderman of Mercia, and acknowledged allegiance to Alfred. We have a charter of that year signed by him in that capacity, to which is appended Alfred's signature as his over-lord: "I Alfred, King, have consented and subscribed." In like manner, in the year 883, a gift of church lands by Alderman Ethelred bears the endorsement, "I Alfred confirm this gift with the sign of the holy cross."

But there is stronger proof of the esteem in which Ethelred was held by his king, in the fact that he became the husband of Ethelfleda, Alfred's eldest daughter. The date of the marriage cannot be ascertained, as no notice of the event occurs in the Chronicles. But even in those times, when girls were married at far earlier ages than now, it could scarcely have happened before 882, for Alfred himself was only married in the autumn of 868. But, both before and after his marriage, the same energy in his government and loyalty to his king seems to have distinguished Ethelred. Mercia had its own witan, which was summoned more frequently than that of Wessex. It was presided over by Ethelred, and settled all questions connected with the internal affairs of the kingdom, subject only to Alfred's

approval. In the report of the session of the witan in 896, already given, we find the express statement that it was summoned "with the knowledge and approbation of King Alfred;" but neither then, nor in the earlier sessions of 883 and 886, is there any trace of his further interference. Mercia was left to develop itself in its own way, and under its own laws. We have, unfortunately, no copy of the code which Alfred caused to be prepared for the sister kingdom, but the best Anglo-Saxon scholars agree in holding, that the institutes of Offa were embodied in it, as we have seen that "Ina's dooms" were incorporated in the West Saxon code.

The wisdom of this policy may be gathered from results. The Saxon and Anglian kingdoms remained distinct, but closely confederated, and the differences of language and custom died out rapidly, thus preparing the way for a still closer union. During Ethelred's life Mercia was consolidated and strengthened; and the Welsh on the one side, and the East Anglians on the other, felt a master's hand. On his death, in 910, London and Oxford were at once incorporated in the West Saxon kingdom, and the remainder of Mercia nine years later, on the death of Ethelfleda.

In like manner Alfred's relations with the new and enlarged kingdom of East Anglia are characterised at once by prudence and good faith. Until the outbreak of another war the boundaries of Guthorm Athelstan's kingdom, as settled by the first short treaty of Wedmore, were scrupulously respected.

No attempt was made to recover either Essex on the south, or any of that part of Mercia which lay to the north and east of Watling Street. The only act of sovereignty, on the part of Alfred, was the introduction into East Anglia of a code of laws similar in essence to the West Saxon code, but at the same time carefully recognising and respecting differences springing from custom and race. This code, in fact, is the enlarged treaty of Wedmore, to which reference has been already made.

In the form in which it has come down to us it is called the treaty of Edward and Guthorm, and may possibly have been formally agreed to after Alfred's death by Edward his son and Guthorm II., who is said to have come to the East Anglian throne in 905. However this may be, there can be no doubt that the substance of the code was in force before the death of Guthorm Athelstan in 890, for the preamble begins: "These are the dooms which King Alfred and King Guthorm chose," and declares that the same had been repeatedly ratified between the Saxons and Danes. The differences between the two codes are greater in appearance than reality. Thus the code for the Danish kingdom has one doom only in substitution for the whole Decalogue, and the greater part of the Levitical laws, which are set out in the West Saxon code. This sweeping doom declares that "the people shall love one God only, and zealously renounce every kind of heathendom." The remainder of the code is taken up with declarations of right, and lists of penalties, founded on the

same principles, and inflicted for the same classes of offences, as those in Alfred's dooms. The double liability of every law-breaker to the temporal and spiritual power—the necessity for making amends to the Church, as well as to the Crown and the kin of the injured man—is enforced throughout. In the same way the rights of the several classes of society are valued according to the amount of their property; but in each case the division of race is also recognised, the Saxon paying "were" and "wite," the Dane "lahslit." The only difference of note is, the greater amount of protection which the Danish code endeavours to throw over priests and foreigners. Thus Article XII. enacts that "if any man wrong an ecclesiastic, or foreigner, as to money or life, the king, or earl, or bishop shall be to him in place of a kinsman; and let boot be strictly made according as the deed may be, to Christ, and to the king; or let him avenge the deed very deeply who is king among the people." This distinction may have arisen from the necessity of shielding Christian clergy, in those parts where the majority of the people were still Pagans, who remembered the sack and burning of the monasteries; and from the desire of Alfred to encourage intercourse between his own immediate subjects and the East Anglians.

After a few restless years, ending in the outbreak of 885, when Alfred's fleet crossed from Rochester to avenge the breach of peace by the seafaring portion of Guthorm Athelstan's people, that prince seems to have kept faith with his over-lord, and

to have lived quietly at home. Whether his conversion was sincere or not we cannot tell; but certainly, under the influence of the treaty-code, and the intercourse with the neighbouring kingdoms, and with the remnants of the old Anglian stock which remained within their borders, the Danes, who dwelt in all the central counties bordering on Watling Street, became a Christian people. In 890 Guthorm Athelstan died, and was buried at Thetford. He was succeeded by one Eohric, a Northman, under whom the Danes settled on the coasts of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex appear to have returned to their old piratical habits, if not to heathenism, and to have made common cause with Hasting in his great invasion of England. But even after the defeat of the last great viking the policy of Alfred remained unchanged. With the exception of the western portion of Essex, which he incorporated in Mercia for the protection of London, the boundaries of East Anglia were left as they had been settled by the treaty of Wedmore.

The Northumbrian kingdom can scarcely be reckoned amongst the neighbours of Wessex, but even there Alfred's influence was acknowledged. After the death of Halfdene, Guthrid, said to have been a son of Hardicanute, king of Denmark, succeeded. He was a Christian, and became the firm ally of Alfred, who assisted him in the restoration of the Church of Durham, and contributed, out of that eighth of his income which was set apart for these purposes, to the needs of other churches and servants of God dwelling in Northumbria. Unbroken peace

was maintained between the two kingdoms during all Alfred's days.

Kent and Sussex were mere appanages of Wessex before Alfred came to the throne, but had not until now been thoroughly incorporated. This was now done. Instead of a cadet of the royal family of Cerdic ruling as king in one or the other of them, as Ethelwulf and Athelstan had done, they were now placed under Alfred's aldermen, and were subject, no doubt, to the same burdens, and entitled to the same privileges, as Wiltshire or Berkshire. At the same time local traditions and customs were respected, such as gavelkind, which remains in Kent to this day.

Thus the King lived, in perfect amity with his neighbours, and without a thought of abusing his superior strength. No soldier of Alfred's ever drew sword except in defence of his own home and country. He even put a check on his energetic son-in-law Ethelred of Mercia, when his hand was beginning to be felt too heavily by the people of North Wales. No great soldier had ever more plausible pretexts for despoiling his neighbours. All his boundaries towards the north and east wanted rectifying, and occasions for quarrel with the East Anglians, and Welsh, and Northumbrians were never far to seek. But in his eyes strength and power were simply trusts, to be used by their possessors for the benefit of the weak. This was his reading of the will and meaning of the King who commanded him, and he acted on it with a single mind, exercising a forbearance and moderation in his

wars, negotiations, and treaties, for which it would be hard to find a parallel.

Indeed, one is at times inclined to be impatient of his great patience; to think that for his people's sake his hand should have been heavier upon Guthorm and Hasting, when they were in his power; to wish that he had not left the task of incorporating all England in one kingdom to his successors. We are all tempted in our secret hearts to believe that the great Italian was right in putting mercy, courteousness, truthfulness, in the category of luxuries which princes can only afford to use with the most guarded moderation.

"The present manner of living," Machiavelli writes (cap. xiv.), "is so different from the way that ought to be taken, that he who neglects what is done to follow what ought to be done, will sooner learn how to ruin than how to preserve himself. For a tender man, and one that desires to be honest in everything, must needs run a great hazard among so many of a contrary principle. Wherefore it is necessary for a prince that is willing to subsist to harden himself, and learn to be good or otherwise according to the exigencies of his affairs." And again (cap. xix.), "How honourable it is for a prince to keep his word, and act rather with integrity than craft, I suppose every one understands. Nevertheless experience has shown in our times that those princes who have not pinned themselves up to that punctuality and preciseness have done great things, and by their cunning and subtlety not only circumvented and pierced the brains of those with whom they had to deal, but have overcome and been

too hard for those who have been so superstitiously exact. Nor was there ever any prince that wanted lawful pretence to justify his breach of promise. And men are so simple in their temper, and so submissive to their present necessities, that he that is neat and cleanly in his collusions shall never want people to practise them upon. A prince, therefore, is not obliged to have all the forementioned good qualities in reality, but it is necessary to have them in appearance ; nay, I will be bold to affirm, that having them actually, and employing them on all occasions, they are extremely prejudicial. Whereas, having them only in appearance, they turn to better account. It is honourable to seem mild, and merciful, and courteous, and religious, and sincere, and indeed to be so, provided your mind be so rectified and prepared, that you can act quite contrary on occasion."

But the more attentively we study Alfred's life, the more clearly does the practical wisdom of his methods of government justify itself by results. Of strong princes, with minds "rectified and prepared" on the Machiavellian model, the world has had more than enough, who have won kingdoms for themselves, and used them for themselves, and so left a bitter inheritance to their children and their people. It is well that, here and there in history, we can point to a king whose reign has proved that the highest success in government is not only compatible with, but dependent upon, the highest Christian morality.

CHAPTER XX.

THE KING'S FOE.

Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord.

"*Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.*"

IN the middle of his great reforms, when all England was thrilling with new life, and order and light were beginning to penetrate into the most out-of-the-way corners of the kingdom, the war-cloud gathered again, and Alfred had once more to arm. It was against the old enemy, "the army," as the chroniclers style it —what was left of it, at least, after three years of precarious fighting and plundering in France and Flanders, with a huge accession of recruits from the wild spirits of all the tribes whose struggles were distracting Europe. The anxiety with which the English watched their old foes appears from the care with which their doings are noted year by year in the Saxon Chronicle. Plegmund, or whoever was the editor, had clearly an uneasy feeling that Alfred and his realm had not seen the last of them. So we hear how they went up the Meuse, and plundered from the Meuse to the Scheldt, and from thence

crossed to Amiens in 884, the year that Pope Martin of blessed memory died. In the next year Charles the Bald was killed by a wild boar while hunting, and his death was the signal for renewed activity amongst the Northmen. Another great fleet and army of Pagans now came from Germany into the country of the Old Saxons, and were there defeated in two battles. We have already seen how a division of "the army" in the same year tried their fortune in Kent, and went back to the Continent wiser and poorer pirates.

In 886 "the army," reunited again, sailed and marched up the Seine, and laid siege to Paris, or rather to the island on which lay all that was left of the city. For a whole year the Northmen lay about Paris, but "by the merciful favour of God, and the brave defence of the citizens, could never force their way inside the walls." Indeed, it would seem that they never wrested the bridge from the besieged. At the end of a year the siege was abandoned, and "the army," passing under the bridge, which they had failed to destroy or take, went up the Seine to its junction with the Marne, and then up that river as far as Chezy, where they formed one of their fortified camps. In the following year, on the death of Charles (nephew of Charles the Bald), the unhappy kingdom of the Franks was broken into five portions, Arnulf his nephew, who had in fact usurped the throne in the last few weeks of his uncle's life, keeping the Rhine provinces, with the nominal title of Emperor. The new kings were soon quarrelling, and, as the Saxon Chronicle records, "held their lands in great discord, and fought two general battles, and

oft and many times laid waste the country, and each repeatedly drove out the other."

Thus the descendants, legitimate and illegitimate, of Charlemagne fought over the shreds of his monster empire, exhausting its strength in their selfish struggles ("battles of the kites and crows," as Milton contemptuously summed up the history of similar doings on the smaller arena of England, amongst the Saxon princes in the previous century), while, on every frontier, Saracens, Hungarians, and Scandinavians were hemming it in, and cutting it short. In the very heart of it a host of Northmen were holding the richest portions, and carrying rapine and insult to the gates of the city where, only fifty years before, the Paladins of Charlemagne had been holding their great pageants.

The miseries of the next few years in those fair lands are scarcely to be paralleled in modern history. In 891, however, Arnulf had established his own authority in the Rhine provinces, and was able to gather a strong army of Eastern Franks, Saxons, and Bavarians, and lead them against the common enemy. After some reverses, he surprised the Danes in the neighbourhood of Louvaine, and defeated them so signally that the Low Countries were cleared of them altogether, and suffered no further, except from occasional flying visits of a few galleys. The remnants of the broken bands fled southward, attracted towards "the army" of Hasting, who was now holding the town of Amiens, and living on the neighbouring districts, having defeated Odo, the king of the Western

Franks, in several attempts to dislodge him. Another year of Danish occupation brought a terrible famine on the whole country, and effected that in which King Odo had failed. Hasting could hold Amiens no longer, and moved with "the army" to the coast, encamping about Boulogne; to which place also gravitated the remains of the host which had escaped from Louvaine, and no doubt all the rascaldom of the empire. It is probable that Hasting's communications with his countrymen on the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts had never been interrupted, and that the old pirate knew well how rich and prosperous the island had become since he had sailed away from Fulham some thirteen years before. He knew also something of the strength and temper of the King whom he would have to meet there, and, had a choice been open to him, would doubtless have preferred some other venture. But behind him lay a famine-stricken land; round him a larger muster of reckless fighters than any he had yet led; before him, within sight, at an easy day's sail, the shores of a land on which no hostile foot had been planted for eight long years. So there, on the cliffs above Boulogne, Hasting, like a leader of the same type in the first years of this nineteenth century, planned the invasion of Alfred's kingdom, and waited for a favourable autumn wind to carry over his fleet.

Such are, briefly, the details which we gather from the chroniclers of the events which preceded, and brought about, the third great invasion which Alfred had to meet.

His great antagonist in this last war was already in the decline of life, and had grown grey in crime. Of all the leaders of the hosts of heathen Northmen, who were the scourge of Western Europe in the ninth century, he stands out as the most ruthless and false, as well as one of the ablest and most successful. "The worst man that ever was born, and who has done most harm in our age," is the summary of his character and career in the old French chronicler—

> "Le plus mal hom qui une nasquist,
> E qui al siecle plus mal fist."

We know something already of his later life since 879. The story of his earlier doings owes probably much of its romance to the rhyming chroniclers who sung of his atrocities, but is clear enough in general outline to claim a place in history, and a moment's attention from those who would rightly appreciate our hero-king.

The great and indecisive battle of Fontenoy near Auxerre, where the grandsons of Charlemagne brought their rival claims to the decision of the sword in the year 841, exhausted the empire, and left it open to the onslaughts of the Northmen, and the freebooters of all races who swelled their ranks. Within five years of that great slaughter a formidable army of these marauders were already in the heart of France, and had sacked and burnt the town of Amboise, and plundered the district between the Loire and Cher. About the year of Alfred's birth they laid siege to Tours, from which they were repulsed by the gallantry of the citizens, assisted by the miraculous aid of

Saint Martin. It is at this siege that Hasting first appears as a leader.

His birth is uncertain. In some accounts he is said to have been the son of a peasant of Troyes, the capital of Champagne, and to have forsworn his faith, and joined the Danes in his early youth, from an inherent lust of battle and plunder. In others he is called the son of the jarl Atte. But, whatever his origin, by the middle of the century he had established his title to lead the Northern hordes in those fierce forays which helped to shatter the Carlovingian Empire to fragments. After the retreat from Tours he and the Viking Biorn—surnamed "Cote de Fer" from an iron plate which was said to cover the only vulnerable part of his body—established themselves in a fortified camp on the Seine, and from thence plundered the whole of the neighbouring country, until it was too exhausted to maintain them longer. When the banks of the Seine were exhausted, the leaders separated, and, while Biorn pushed up the river again, Hasting put out to sea, entered the Loire, and established a camp on a marshy island not far from its mouth. Here he remained for some time, fulfilling his mission while anything was left to plunder. When the land was bare, leaving the despoiled provinces he again put to sea, and, sailing southwards still, pushed up the Tagus and Guadalquiver, and ravaged the neighbourhoods of Lisbon and Seville. But no settlement in Spain was possible at this time. The Peninsula had lately had for Caliph Abdalrahman the Second, called El Mouzaffer, "The Victorious," and the vigour of his rule had made

the Arabian kingdom in Spain the most efficient power for defence in Europe. Hasting soon recoiled from the Spanish coasts, and returned to his old haunts.

The leaders of the Danes in England, the Sidrocs and Hinguar and Hubba, had, as we have seen, a special delight in the destruction of churches and monasteries, mingling a fierce religious fanaticism with their thirst for battle and plunder. This exceeding bitterness of the Northmen may be fairly laid in great measure to the account of the thirty years of proselytising warfare, which Charlemagne had waged in Saxony, and along all the northern frontier of his empire. The boldest spirits amongst all those German tribes, who scorned to turn renegades at the sword's point, had drifted away northwards with a tradition of deepest hatred to the Cross, and the forms of civilization which it carried in its wake. The time for vengeance came before one generation had died out, and the fairest provinces of the empire were now paying, by the burning of churches, the sack of abbeys, the destruction of libraries, and the blood of their children, for the merciless proselytising of the imperial armies. The brood of so-called religious wars have brought more ills on the poor old world than all others that have ever been hatched on her broad and patient bosom —a brood that never misses coming home to roost.

Hasting seems to have been filled with a double portion of this spirit, which he had indulged throughout his career in the most inveterate hatred to priests and holy places. It was probably this, coupled with

a certain weariness—commonplace murder and sacrilege having grown tame, and lost their charm—which incited him to the most daring of all his exploits, a direct attack on the head of Christendom, and the sacred city.

Hasting then, about the year 860, planned an attack on Rome, and the proposal was well received by his followers. Sailing again round Spain, and pillaging on their way both on the Spanish and Moorish coasts, they entered the Mediterranean, and, steering for Italy, landed in the bay of Spezzia, near the town of Luna. Luna was the place where the great quarries of the Carrara marble had been worked ever since the times of the Cæsars. The city itself was, it is said, in great part built of white marble, and the *candentia mœnia Lunæ* deceived Hasting into the belief that he was actually before Rome: so he sat down before the town which he had failed to surprise. The hope of taking it by assault was soon abandoned, but Hasting obtained his end by guile. Feigning a mortal illness, he sent messages to the citizens offering to leave all his accumulated plunder to the Church if they would allow his burial in consecrated ground. The offer was accepted, and a procession of Northmen, bearing and following the bier of Hasting, was admitted within the walls. The rites of the Church were duly performed, but, at the moment when the body was about to be lowered into the grave, Hasting sprang from the bier, and, seizing a sword which had been concealed near him, slew the officiating bishop. His followers found their arms at the same moment; the

priests were massacred, the gates thrown open, and the city taken and spoiled. Luna never recovered its old prosperity after the raid of the Northmen, and in Dante's time had fallen into utter decay. But Hasting's career in Italy ended with the sack of Luna; and, giving up all hope of attacking Rome, he re-embarked with the spoil of the town, the most beautiful of the women, and all youths who could be used as soldiers or rowers. His fleet was wrecked on the south coasts of France on its return westward, and all the spoil lost; but the devil had work yet for Hasting and his men, who got ashore in sufficient numbers to recompense themselves for their losses by the plunder of Provence.

In these parts he remained until 863. In that year he received an embassy from Charles the Bald, headed by the Abbot of St. Denis, and agreed to receive baptism for a large sum of money, and the cession to him in fee of the district of Chartres, which he was to hold as the king's vassal. He seems now to have lived quietly till the year 876, when he joined the army which Charles the Simple was sending against Rollo. Hasting undertook a mission to the camp of his brother pirate on the banks of the Eure, bearing the king's offer of fiefs, and a permanent settlement to the Danish leader and his army. His mission was unsuccessful, and finding himself suspected of foul dealing, and in consequent danger, on his return to the French army, he left his adopted home, and returned to his old life. How he had spent the intervening years we have partly heard already.

Guthrum, his old companion in arms, died in 890,

and a feeling of restlessness and rebellion against the steady, constant pressure of the orderly kingdom of their liege lord was creeping through the coasts of East Anglia which were most remote from Alfred's border. Eohric was either unable or unwilling, to restrain the seafaring portion of his people; and so the encouragement was given to Hasting and "the army" which brought them eighteen months later to the hills above Boulogne, and cost England and Alfred three years of war.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE THIRD WAVE.

"Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gather yourselves together, and it shall come to nought: for God is with us."

IN the autumn of 893 the great army broke up from its Boulogne camp. Hasting had now matured all his plans, and collected a fleet large enough to transport the whole of his troops across the narrow sea. The ships, Ethelwerd says, were built at Boulogne; at any rate they were procured by some means in such abundance, that when the army embarked, "they came over in one passage, horses and all." The first detachment, filling 250 ships, were sent on by Hasting to seize the nearest point. They steered straight across the Channel, and landed without opposition at the mouth of the little river Rother, about seven miles west of Dungeness. The Chronicles call the river Limen (or Lymne); but the position of Appledore, the undoubted site of the first Danish camp of this year, on the banks of the Rother, seems to decide the question as to the identity of the stream up which "they towed their ships for four miles, to the borders of the Andreds Weald." This was a forest, 120 miles long, and thirty miles in

breadth, stretching from Romney Marsh to the eastern part of Hampshire. Here the Danes stormed a small fort garrisoned by a few churlish men, and, without encountering further resistance, fixed upon Appledore as the site for a permanent camp, which they forthwith set to work to establish.

Hasting himself was not long after them. He sailed with his own immediate followers, in eighty ships, passed up the Channel, round the North Foreland, and into the East Swale, the branch of the Medway which separates the Isle of Sheppey from the mainland. Some ten miles up the Swale a little creek runs south, on which the market-town of Milton, celebrated for its native oysters, now stands. This is, no doubt, the Middleton of the Saxon Chronicle, where Hasting now "wrought himself a strong fortress." Remains of fortifications in the neighbouring marshes are still pointed out as the work of the Danes. Between the two camps, which would be some twenty-six miles apart as the crow flies, lay the Andreds Weald, offering immediate shelter in the event of a reverse to either wing of the army, and direct communication with the camp of their comrades. Through the recesses of the great wood they could penetrate westward into the heart of Wessex, and approach within a few miles of Winchester or Reading without quitting cover. Both camps were established on the banks of rivers, navigable to the Danish galleys, so that, if the worst came, there were always means of retreat for any who might escape. This position was a very formidable one, and admirably chosen for the ends

Hasting had in view. The strength of the camps themselves is proved by the fact, that Alfred never attempted to storm either of them.

The King was now in his forty-fifth year, and had learnt much in the wars of his youth and early manhood. As we might expect, the tactics and method of defence adopted by him in his mature years offer a marked contrast to the impetuous gallantry of his early campaigns. His first act seems to have been, to send his son Edward, with some light troops, to the neighbourhood of the two camps, more for the purpose of watching than fighting; his next, to strengthen the garrisons of his forts. Then, putting himself at the head of that portion of his subjects whose turn it was for military service, he marched into Kent, and took up a strong position, from whence he could best watch both the camps. The name of the place where Alfred laid out his camp is not given in any chronicler. Possibly it was actually in the Andreds Weald, and had no name, for it is described (by Florence of Worcester) as "a place naturally very strong, because it was surrounded on all sides by water, high rocks, and overhanging woods." And now at once the value of the King's army reforms became clear. The Danes felt the presence of a foe stronger and better disciplined than themselves, whose vigilance was unceasing. The watching army never dwindled, and the invaders dared not leave their entrenchments except in small bands. These, however, were active and mischievous. They stole out for plunder "along the weald in bands and troops, by whichever border was for the time with-

out forces." Then the alarm would be given by the Etheling Edward, and the marauders were "sought out by bands from the King's army, or from the burghs." Thus a desultory warfare continued "almost every day, either by day or night," as the Saxon Chronicle describes it, until the theatre of war is suddenly and completely changed, and the head-quarters of both sides, and the scene of operations, pass over to the north of the Thames.

It was now nearly a year from Hasting's landing, and no help had come to him as yet from the Danes settled in East Anglia and Northumbria. It is clear that he had been intriguing with them, for Alfred had had to exact a renewal of their oaths, and even to take fresh hostages from the East Angles. Now, as the desultory war dragged on, week after week, and month after month, the Danes of the northern kingdom got more restless and excited, and Hasting, hoping much from this rekindling of the old race-hatred, and seeing no chance of doing anything more in his present position, resolved to abandon his two camps on the south of the Thames, and cross into East Anglia. He had never ventured yet out of his fortified camps in force, but, now that the change of base had been determined on, it was worth while playing for a large stake. Accordingly, Hasting sent off his ships to a rendezvous at Bemfleet, on the Essex coast, and, starting with the whole of his land-forces, pushed by Alfred's camp, through the forest, and into Hampshire, where he met one of his marauding parties, laden with spoil. With this booty, and what he could

gather himself in his rapid march, he now turned northwards, hoping to get to the fords of the Thames before Alfred could overtake him. In this he was disappointed. The King and the Etheling Edward caught the Danish army at Farnham, and forced them to fight. In this first general action of the war the Saxons were completely victorious. Hasting's army lost the whole of their plunder, and the horses they had brought with them from France. One of their kings (Dr. Pauli suggests Biorn) was desperately wounded, and his condition impeded their flight. They made good their retreat to the Thames, however; but, either from panic or want of knowledge, struck it at a place where there was no ford, and, besides the great slaughter at Farnham, numbers of them were lost in crossing the river. The first rally they made was in an island, at the junction of the Thames and Colne, called Thorney Island. Here Hasting halted, and his ships probably brought him supplies, and the broken bands of his army joined him. But Alfred was on his track, and in a short time the island was completely invested by Saxon troops. It had thus become only a question of days. If the blockade could have been maintained, Hasting and the army must have been soon at Alfred's mercy. Unhappily the besieged, by the aid of their ships, were better supplied than the besiegers; and, moreover, the time of service of the army which fought at Farnham had expired, and the reliefs had to be brought up at this critical moment. Alfred was himself engaged in bringing up the relieving force, when news reached him which

induced him at once to change the whole of his plans, and to abandon for the time the hope of crushing his foe once for all in Thorney Island.

Although Hasting had suffered so severely in his march and flight, the sagacity which prompted the movement was at once justified. Scarcely had the beaten army appeared to the north of the Thames when the Danes of the east coast, from Essex to Northumberland, unable any longer to resist the contagion of battle, broke into open hostility, and rushed to the aid of their robber brethren. They hastily gathered a large fleet, which sailed at once for the southern coasts of Wessex, for the purpose of creating a diversion, and raising the blockade of Hasting at the mouth of the Colne. A hundred of these ships pushed up the Exe, while forty more made their way round (the Saxon Chronicle says "by the north") into the Bristol Channel. Each fleet carried an armed force besides the crews; and Exeter in the south, and some fortress on the north coast of Devonshire, were formally invested. This was the news which reached Alfred on his march towards Essex, and it had all the effect which Hasting had looked for. Alfred at once resolved to march westward himself. The Southern Welsh who dwelt in Cornwall might follow the example of the East Anglians and Northumbrians, and join the invaders, and the whole realm be in a blaze again, as it was in 879. In any case he could not leave Somerset and Wilts, probably the richest and most populous parts of the whole of Wessex, and those in which his own

property was chiefly situate, open to attack from the west.

The blockade of Thorney Island was therefore abandoned at once, and Hasting, with the wrecks of the two armies which had garrisoned the camps of Appledore and Milton, escaped to Bemfleet. Here he found his ships lying, and his wife and sons, and the heavy baggage of his army, already occupying the old fortifications which had been thrown up there by some Danish leader, if not by himself, nine years before. His ranks were soon recruited, by bands of Danes from the outlying parts of the kingdom. He lost no time in his trenches, but started at once on a plundering expedition into Mercia.

Before starting by forced marches for the west, Alfred had divided his forces, and sent a strong body, under the command probably of his son Edward, who had greatly distinguished himself in Farnham fight, to reinforce Ethelred, who was holding London with the Mercian troops. That able and energetic leader immediately planned an attack on the camp at Bemfleet, in accordance with the wishes of the citizens of London, who could not brook the constant menace of such a hornets' nest in their immediate neighbourhood. So Ethelred marched suddenly upon Bemfleet camp, and, for the first time in these wars, the Danes were thoroughly beaten behind their own fortifications, and in a position of their own choosing. The camp was stormed, and all the booty found there taken, and amongst the prisoners were the wife and two sons of Hasting. There is a passage in the

Saxon Chronicle, and in Florence of Worcester, to the effect that these boys had shortly before been sent as hostages to Alfred, who had caused them to be baptized, he and Ethelred acting as their sponsors, after which they had been sent back to their father. And now again Alfred restored them and their mother to his faithless enemy, but the spoil was shared amongst the citizens of London and Ethelred's garrison. The Danish fleet was also captured at Bemfleet, and all the serviceable vessels were taken to London or Rochester, while the remnant were broken up or burnt. Hasting's means of retreat were thus destroyed, but the disaster only seems to have braced the nerves of the old pirate for greater efforts. He returned to the neighbourhood of Bemfleet, collected the remnants of the army, received large reinforcements again from East Anglia, and entrenched another camp at Shobury, some ten miles east of his former position. From thence he marched out at the head of another strong force, along the northern bank of the Thames, and then up the Severn valley, thus carrying fire and sword into the heart of Ethelred's own country. His intention may have been to relieve the Danish forces in Devonshire, and to cut Alfred off from his supplies and base. If so, he was quickly and completely foiled. Ethelred hastened down to the threatened district, and sent summonses to all the neighbouring king's aldermen and thanes. The vigour and alacrity of the response are very marked. "Then Ethelred," the Saxon Chronicle says, "and Ethelhelm the alderman (of Wilts), and Ethel-

noth the alderman (of Somerset), and the king's thanes who were then at home in the fortified places, gathered forces from every town east of the Parret, and as well west as east of Selwood, and also north of the Thames, and west of the Severn, and also some part of the North Welsh people." Hasting was now in the district where Guthrum had attempted a settlement, and which had been the scene of the campaign of Ethandune. The country knew well what to expect from the tender mercies of the Dane, and rose as one man, without a thought of the established courses, or whose turn it might be for the regular three months' service. Hasting met the rising by turning northwards, abandoning all hope of penetrating Wessex. He might look for more encouragement, at least for less enthusiasm of resistance, on the North Welsh border: so he made no halt till he reached Buttington in Montgomeryshire, on the banks of the Severn, where he entrenched himself and waited for Ethelred. Buttington is a border parish; Offa's dyke, which runs through it, is still the boundary between Shropshire and Montgomeryshire. There are several earthworks still to be seen in the neighbourhood, and some thirty years ago a vast deposit of human bones was disco vered in digging the foundations of the schools there, near the parish church.

Ethelred on his arrival divided his forces, so that he might watch both banks of the Severn, and beset Hasting's camp very straitly, so that no succours or supplies could reach the besieged. "When they had now sat there many weeks on both sides the

river," the Chronicle tells us, "then were the enemy distressed for want of food, and having eaten a great part of their horses, being then starved with hunger, they went out against the men who were encamped on the east bank of the river, and fought against them. And the Christians had the victory. And Ordeh, a king's thane, and many other king's thanes were slain, and of the Danish men there was very great slaughter made. And that part which got away thence was saved by flight."

Hasting saved himself by crossing the Mercian border over Watling Street, falling back on a part of East Anglia far removed from Alfred's influence, and which had stubbornly resisted all but the semblance of Christianity. Either the encouragement which he found here, in the shape of recruits and sympathy, tempted him to renew the struggle in the north of Mercia, or he may have thought that his best chance of succouring his allies in Devonshire lay in piercing to the west coast at some point where his great fleet, already in those seas, could fetch him off, and land him on the shores of the Bristol Channel. At any rate, after removing the Danish women and children, and all their possessions, and such ships as were left them, from Shobury to the island of Mersea—at the mouth of the Blackwater, a few miles south of Colchester, a safer spot, and twenty miles further from London—and committing the protection of the settlement to the East Anglians of those parts, now his open allies, Hasting went back again with a fresh army, "at one stretch, day and night" says the Saxon

Chronicle, and appeared suddenly before Chester. The royal town was not surprised, and was held by a strong garrison; so Hasting swept the country of cattle, killed the few people he found outside the walls, eat up or destroyed all the crops, which were still standing in the late autumn, and then, after two days, retired into the peninsula of Wirral, and there went into winter quarters. Alfred meanwhile had compelled the Danes to raise the sieges of Exeter and the fortress in North Devon, and had driven them to their ships; but as the fleet still hung about the coasts of Devonshire and South Wales (Cornwall), he did not think it safe to leave the far west for the present, being no doubt well satisfied with the reports which reached him of the vigorous way in which Hasting had been met when he threatened Central Wessex. So the King wintered in Devonshire.

The first eventful year of the war was now ended, and on every side the enormous increase of power in the nation consequent on Alfred's rule had proved itself. The pagan army had not only been outfought, as in past years at Ashdown and Ethandune, but outmarched and outmanœuvred by Alfred and Ethelred, and the Saxon and Mercian levies. They had not taken a single place of any importance, while one of their entrenched camps had been stormed, and four others abandoned. The issue could not be doubtful, unless some great reinforcements came to Hasting from over the sea; but the old pirate was still at the head of a formidable army, and had opened up a good recruiting ground on the east coasts. There was no

room for carelessness or foolhardiness in the coming spring.

The campaign of 895 was probably opened by Ethelred, or some Mercian earl, who made a successful dash at Hasting in the Wirral peninsula, and carried off all the store of cattle and provision which he had accumulated, for the Saxon Chronicle notices this loss as the reason why he broke up his camp there. So the Danes took the field, and, avoiding Chester and Mercia for the time, marched into North Wales. Here, before Ethelred could come at them, they collected a large booty in the valleys, and then retreated into Northumbria, "fearing," says Florence, "to return through Mercia." Dr. Pauli gathers, from an obscure passage in Ethelward's Chronicle, that on his march southwards Hasting was intercepted by Ethelnoth at Stamford, and that a battle was fought there. In any case, in the course of the summer or autumn, the main body of the Danes arrived safely in the isle of Mersea, and received their women and children from the safe-keeping of their East Anglian allies.

Here they were joined in the autumn by the fleet and the remains of the army which had been in Devonshire. Foiled at all points by Alfred himself, and driven to their ships, they had sailed out of the Exe, and on their voyage eastward had made a sudden descent on the Sussex coast near Chichester. But the garrison and citizens turned out and fought them, "slaying many hundreds, and taking some of their ships." But Hasting was not yet beaten, and, before Alfred

had time to organize an attack on Mersea, put all on board his fleet and sailed boldly up the Thames and the Lea, and once more fortified himself in a strong camp on the latter river, only twenty miles from London. And so the second year of the war ended.

896 opened with a reverse to the Saxon arms. Encouraged by the success of the attack on the Bemfleet camp two years before, and perhaps by the exploit of the citizens of Chichester in the last autumn, the men of London and their garrison marched out to attack Hasting in his camp on the Lea, without waiting the arrival of Alfred or Ethelred. They were beaten by the Danes, and retreated on London, with the loss of four king's thanes. The King now came up, and established himself between Hasting's camp and the city, to protect the people while they reaped their crops. While encamped for this purpose, Alfred, riding one day along the river, discovered a place where the stream might be easily diverted or obstructed, so that it would be impossible for the Danes to pass down it with their fleet. He set to the work at once, and at the same time began to build two forts, one on each side of the Lea, at the point he had selected for diverting the stream. Hasting did not wait for the catastrophe. Confiding the women and children again to the care of the East Anglians, and abandoning his camp and fleet, he marched away again north-west, and established himself for the winter near Bridgnorth (Cwatbridge) in Shropshire, distancing the force which Alfred sent in pursuit. The Londoners took possession of the camp

and fleet in great triumph. Those ships which they could not bring away were burnt, and all which were "stalworth" they brought down to London. And so ended the third and last year of Alfred's last war.

In the spring of 897 Hasting broke up his last camp on English soil. His army was now composed of Northumbrian and East Anglian Danes, as well as of his followers who had embarked from Boulogne three years before. The former marched back to their own homes, while Hasting, with the remains of his own followers, felt his way back to some place on the east coast. Here the women and children rejoined them, and the baffled pirate leader, getting together ships enough to carry him and his fortunes, "went southward over sea to the Seine."

"Thanks be to God!" the Chronicle sums up, "the army had not utterly broken down the English nation: but during those three years it was much more broken down by the mortality which raged amongst cattle and amongst men; and most of all by this, that many of the most eminent of the King's servants in the land died during the three years, some of whom were—Swithulf, bishop of Rochester, and Ceolmund, alderman of Kent, and Beorthulf, alderman of Hants, and Ealherd, bishop of Dorchester, and Eadulf the king's thane in Sussex, and Beornwulf the wicreeve of Winchester, and Ecgulf the king's horse-thane, and many also besides these, though I have named the most famous." A goodly list of men who could ill be spared; most of them, too, we may note, officers in the districts which had borne the brunt of the invasion.

The embers of the fire which Hasting had kindled continued to smoulder after he had left the island. His Northumbrian and East Anglian allies could not at once give up the excitement of the rover's life, which was bred in their blood, and of which they had now again tasted after so many years of abstinence. They were chiefly dwellers by the sea, and now, abandoning all attempts at inland warfare, fitted out small squadrons of their swift vessels, called "œscs," and in these cruised off the southern coasts of Wessex, inflicting much local damage, and greatly exasperating Alfred and his people. In the course of the autumn Alfred's new galleys swept the whole of these marauders off the sea, capturing twenty of their "œscs" at one time or another. But the only detailed account we have of an action between the King's ships and the pirates suggests rather that the Danes still retained their mastery as sailors, and that Alfred and his new ships, with their motley crews, only prevailed against them by sheer weight and superior numbers.

The story is in the Saxon Chronicle as follows:—"Some time in the same year there came six ships to Wight, and there did much harm, as well as in Devon and elsewhere along the sea-coast. Then the King commanded nine of his new ships to go thither, and they blockaded the passage from the port to the outer sea. Then went the pirates with three of their ships out against them; and three lay in the upper part of the port dry, and the crews were gone out of them on shore. Then the King's ships took two of the three ships at the outer port, and killed the crews, and the

other ship escaped. In that also all the men were killed except five, and it escaped because the King's ships got aground. They indeed were aground very disadvantageously, for three lay on that side where the Danish ships were aground, and all the rest upon the other side, so that no one of them could get to the others. But when the water had ebbed many furlongs from the ships, then the Danish men went from their three ships to the other three which were left by the tide on their side, and fought against them there." "Then might you have seen," says the Chronicle of Huntingdon, "the English people of the six ships looking at the battle, and unable to bear them help, beating their breasts with their hands, and tearing their hair with their nails"—a grim little picture of the doings of the ancestors of the Blakes and Nelsons. "There were slain Lucumon, the king's reeve, and Wulfheard the Frisian, and Abbæ the Frisian, and Ethelhere the Frisian, and Ethelferth [the king's neatherd; and of all the men, Frisians and English, 72, and of the Danish men, 120. Then, however, the flood-tide came to the Danish ships before the English could get theirs off: they therefore rowed away. Nevertheless, they were so damaged that they could not row round Sussex; and there the sea cast two of them on shore, and the crews were led to the King at Winchester; and he commanded them to be there hanged. And the men who were in the single ship came to East Anglia sorely wounded."

It appears that Alfred also hanged all that fell into

his hands of the crews of the remainder of the twenty pirate vessels. Some of his biographers are inclined to gloss, or extenuate, the King's severity in these last dealings with the pirates. It seems to me the most wise and merciful course he could have taken. The war was now virtually at an end, and it was necessary to impress upon the loose seafaring population of Northumbria and East Anglia that they could only continue it in small marauding excursions on their own account at the peril of their necks. That the King, at this triumphant crisis of his life, as well as on every other occasion, was lenient to his foes, and scrupulously careful to act up to the high standard he had set himself, is abundantly clear by the fact that he exacted no penalty whatever from Northumbria, and from East Anglia only annexed a corner of Essex. It would have been easy for him and Ethelred to have marched from Watling Street to the Forth, and the Danish under-kings were practically at his mercy. But they, and the bulk of their people, had taken no active part with Hasting, and the King would not punish them for want of power to control the most turbulent of their people, in such times, and under such temptations. So there was no reckoning for the past; only, as they could not hinder their nominal subjects from turning pirates, the King must read a lesson to such persons. That of Winchester was enough. There is no hint of any further piracy during Alfred's reign.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KING'S HOME.

"*Blessed is the man that doth meditate good things in wisdom.*
"*He shall pitch his tent nigh unto her, and shall lodge in a lodging where good things are.*
"*He shall get his children under her shelter, and shall lodge under her branches.*"

WE may now take leave of the King's public life. All that can be told—at least all that the present writer has to tell of it—lies behind us. How unsatisfactory the picture is at the best; how indistinctly most of the persons stand out from behind the mists of a thousand years; how necessary it has been at every step to hesitate as to the course and meaning of events; how many questions of grave importance remain scarcely stated, and altogether unsolved, no one can feel more strongly than he does. At the same time, unless the attempt has wholly failed, he must have in some sort made clear for his readers the figure of a king who, having by his own energy, and by his personal character and genius, won for himself a position such as no man of the English race ever had before, or has ever had since, never used, or thought of using, his strength and wisdom on his own behalf, or for his own selfish purposes—a king, in short,

who yielded himself to do the work to which God had called him, simply and thoroughly, never losing the consciousness that he was himself under command.

We have still, however, to gather up such fragments as are left of the home-life of Alfred, and to glance at the work in which, after all, he probably most delighted—his writings and translations.

Alfred, as we know, had no settled home. We find him now in one county, now in another, at one of the royal residences, which were indeed so numerous that we can only suppose the accommodation at many of them to have been of the roughest and simplest description. The ordinary houses of the Saxon nobles consisted of a large central hall, with chapel and rooms for the family attached, and outhouses for the servants and followers grouped round them. The whole of these buildings were of wood up to Alfred's time, and there were no deep moats or military defences of any kind. The king's residences differed only in size from those of the nobility; but Alfred must have needed much more room than any of his predecessors, as his court became very large. Foreigners of all nations flocked to it, for whom special and liberal provision was made in the distribution of his income; and, besides his officers of state, he had always in attendance a strong body of troops, and a number of skilled artisans and mechanics.

The importance which he attached to the improvement of his own residences, and of the architecture of his churches and other public buildings, is shown by the large proportion of his income which, as we have

seen, was devoted to building purposes. But notwithstanding all his efforts, and the magnificence of many of his new buildings, compared with any then known in England, the quarters in which the royal household lived were often rough places enough, as we know incidentally from the history of his most celebrated invention—the horn-lantern. At the time that he made the division of his yearly income in the manner we have heard, Alfred also resolved to offer to God no less of the service of his mind and body than of his worldly wealth. "He accordingly made a vow to consecrate half of his time to God's service; and this vow, so far as his infirmity would allow, he performed with all his might, by night and day. But inasmuch as he could not equally distinguish the length of the hours by night, on account of the darkness, and also oftentimes of the day on account of the storms and clouds, he began to consider by what means, without any uncertainty, relying on the mercy of God, he might discharge the tenor of his vow till his death. After much thought on these things, he at length hit on a shrewd invention. He commanded his chaplains to supply wax of sufficient quantity and quality, and had it weighed in such a manner that when there was so much of it in the scales as would equal the weight of seventy-two pence, he caused the chaplains to make six candles thereof, of equal length; so that each candle might have twelve divisions marked across it. By this plan, therefore, those six candles burned for twenty-four hours—a night and day—without fail, before the sacred relics of many of God's elect, which

always accompanied him wherever he went. But sometimes they would not continue burning a whole day and night, till the same hour that they were lighted on the previous evening, from the violence of the wind, which blew without intermission through the doors and windows of the churches, the fissures at the divisions in the plankings of the walls, or the thin canvas of the tents. When, therefore, the candles burned out and finished their course before the proper time, the King considered by what means he could shut out the wind; and so, by a useful and cunning invention, he had a lantern beautifully constructed in wood and white ox-horn, which, when skilfully planed till it is thin, is no less transparent than a vessel of glass. This lantern, therefore, was wonderfully made of wood and horn, as we before said; and by night a candle was put into it, which shone as brightly without as within, and was not extinguished by the wind; for the opening of the lantern was also closed up, according to the King's command, by a door of horn. By this contrivance these six candles, lighted in succession, lasted twenty-four hours—neither more nor less; and when these were extinguished, others were lighted."

His taste and genius for science, and for mechanics, are mentioned in several chroniclers, but there is no description left of any other invention of his. Asser, in a passage which sums up his everyday mode of life, says: "During the frequent wars and other trammels of this present life, the invasions of the Pagans, and his own daily infirmities of body, he continued to carry on the government, and to exercise

hunting in all its branches; to teach his workers in gold and artificers of all kinds, his falconers, hawkers, and dog-keepers; to build houses majestic and good beyond all the precedents of his ancestors by his new mechanical inventions; to recite the Saxon books, and especially to learn by heart the Saxon poems, and to make others learn them; and he alone never desisted from studying to the best of his ability. He attended the mass, and other daily services of religion; he was frequent in psalm-singing and prayer at the hours both of day and night. He also went to the churches in the night-time to pray secretly, and unknown to his courtiers; he bestowed alms and largesses on natives and foreigners of all countries; he was affable and pleasant to all, and curiously eager to investigate things unknown."

That part of the above statement which speaks of the King's teaching his workers in gold has received curious illustration from the famous jewel found at Newton Park, near Athelney, in 1693, and which is now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. The jewel consists of a figure holding a flower in each hand, and composed of blue, green, red, and white enamel, let into golden cells. The settings and back of the jewel are of pure gold, the latter being chased in a graceful pattern. It is about half an inch thick, and round the outside runs the scroll, "Alfred had me worked"—"Alfred mec heht gewyrcan"—stamped on the gold edge.

The above description, from the pen of the intimate friend who was at his side during all the

later years of peace, helps us to picture to ourselves the life which the King lived in his great court—half camp, half city—which moved about all the southern counties, stimulating industry, and overawing outlaws and lawless men on the one hand, and exercising on the other a close and severe control over the acts of aldermen and sheriffs, and the decisions of judges. In the midst of this home of work, and with the example of the chief, and most diligent, worker always before their eyes, his family grew up round him.

In his private life the King seems to have been as happy as he deserved to be. Of Queen Ethelswitha we know nothing, except that she was the faithful consort of her husband, and bore him many children. The early training of these must have been her chief work, and how admirably it was performed may be inferred from the results. Every child of Alfred turned out well. The girls of the royal family were trained in all kinds of womanly work; the four daughters of Edward the Elder, who must have been brought up in Ethelswitha's household, having been specially distinguished for their great assiduity and skill in spinning, weaving, and needlework. And the processes used in these arts were by no means simple. Bishop Adhelm speaks, even in his time, of webs formed "with threads of purple and various other colours woven in with the shuttle, thrown from one side to the other, thereby forming a variety of different colours and figures, each in its own proper compartment knit together with exquisite art."

The higher education, of girls as well as boys, went on in the schools attached to the court under Alfred's own eye. Probably his own daughters were at least as well taught as Queen Edgitha in the next century, who was often seen by Ingulphus in his boyhood, when his father was in the palace, as he came from school. "When I have met her she would examine me in my learning, and from grammar would proceed to logic, which she also understood, concluding with me in most subtle argument; then causing one of her attendant maids to present me with a piece of money, I was dismissed to the larder, where I was sure to get something to eat." Ethelswitha survived her husband, and died at the court of her son in 905.

The eldest child, Ethelfleda, born in the first year of her father's reign, when the Danes were in Reading camp, was married very early to the gallant Ethelred, the Alderman of Mercia, Alfred's "princeps militiæ," as he is sometimes called. She shared the government with her husband, as Lady of Mercia, and after his death ruled gallantly in the centre of England, consolidating and strengthening the Mercian frontiers, against the Welsh on one side, and the East Anglians on the other.

Their second daughter was Ethelgeda, who became abbess of the great monastery at Shaftesbury, which the King built soon after the peace of Wedmore. Her residence there may probably account for the special attachment which Alfred showed to the town, which he rebuilt as early as A.D. 880, if we may accept the evidence of William of Malmesbury. He

mentions in his chronicle that he had seen a stone which was dug out of the old walls in his time, and which bore the inscription, "A.D. 880, Alfredus Rex fecit hanc Urbem, regni sui 8°."

The third daughter, Elfrida, or Elfrith, became the wife of Baldwin of Flanders, the eldest son of Judith, Alfred's old playfellow, who had scandalized Christian England in the time of his boyhood by her successive marriages with his father and brother. How or when the reconciliation between them took place we do not know.

The boys were Edward, afterwards King Edward the Elder, and Ethelward. Ethelward, the younger son, showed a turn for study, and, "by the divine counsels and prudence of the King, was consigned to the schools of learning, where, with the children of almost all the nobility of the country, and many also who were not noble, he prospered under the diligent care of his teachers." While Ethelward then was sent to Oxford (or whatever was the leading school of England), Edward seems never to have got beyond the school which was attached to his father's court. Asser states that he and Elfrith were bred up in the King's court, "and continue there to this day" (probably about A.D. 887), adding in words which clearly apply to both the boys, though Ethelward's name is not mentioned. He continues: "They had the love of all about them, and showed affability and gentleness to all, both natives and foreigners, and were in complete subjection to their father. Nor amongst their other studies which pertain to this life, and are fit for

noble youths, are they suffered to pass their time idly and unprofitably without learning the liberal arts; for they have carefully learned the Psalms and Saxon books, especially the Saxon poems, and are continually in the habit of making use of books."

But Edward inherited all his father's vigour and courage, as well as his kindly courtesy, and was addicted to, and no doubt encouraged by Alfred in, the practice of martial sports, and hunting. There is a romantic story which connects his first marriage with a hunting expedition. Turning aside from his sport to visit an old woman who had been his nurse, he found living with her a girl of great beauty, named Edgina. She was the daughter of a shepherd, according to William of Malmesbury and Brompton, but at any rate was of lowly birth, and had dreamt that the moon shone out of her body so brightly that it illuminated all England. She had told the dream to the old nurse, who had adopted her, and now the Etheling came to make the dream true. There has been much discussion whether they were married, but the better opinion seems to be that they were. In any case, their son Athelstan was recognised by Alfred as his grandson when quite a child, and entrusted to Ethelred and Ethelfleda to bring up. When old enough to be brought to court, his guardians presented him to Alfred, who was so pleased with the boy's look and manner, that he "blessed him for king after his son Edward," and gave him a purple robe, a belt set with jewels, and a Saxon sword in a golden sheath.

Edgina died early, and Edward had a large family by two other wives, of whom three daughters married the most powerful continental princes: Edgitha, the Emperor Otho I.; Edgiva, Charles the Simple; and Ethilda, Hugo the Great, Duke of Burgundy and Neustria, the rival of the Carlovingian line of Frankish kings.

Readers must fill up for themselves the picture of the English life round the great King; and a cheerful and healthy life it must have been, with its regular work interspersed with the well-kept Saints' days and Sundays, on which no bondman could be made to work without thereby gaining a right to his freedom. The discomfort of their houses was little felt by a hardy race, and, while their useful carpentry was of the rudest kind, their ornamental furniture comprised articles inlaid with the precious metals, and candlesticks and goblets and mirrors of wrought silver, and hangings of all bright colours. The descriptions which have reached us of the dresses and ways of the people go far to prove that England was merry England a thousand years ago. Men and women alike delighted in bright colours. The men, in peace time, wore a tunic of wool or linen, with sleeves to the wrists, and girded round the waist, and those who could afford them, bracelets and rings. The women wore dresses of linen or wool, often ornamented with embroidery; and silk hoods with long pendants, mantles, girdles, cuffs, and ribands, were also not unknown to them. Their ornaments were head-bands, necklaces, bracelets, and rings, many

of which were of fine workmanship, and enamelled with gems. Their hair was dressed with curling irons, and with great care; long curls being the mark of a free woman. Even the clergy were addicted to coloured garments and ornaments, which drew down on them, and on the people, the severe censures of stern ecclesiastics such as St. Boniface, who declared that the vain showiness in the dress of his people announced the coming of Antichrist.

Gleemen, posture masters, and jugglers were always at hand to sing and tumble for the amusement of rich and poor during meals and in the evenings; and hunting, and hawking, and sword and buckler play, and horse-racing, filled up the intervals of more serious business. In short, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Court, the life of all but the King, and his bishops, and immediate attendants, must have passed in a round of strenuous work and rough and healthy sport, well calculated to develop the powers of his vigorous, if somewhat indolent people.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE KING AS AUTHOR.

"The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom."

IT is impossible to accept as literally true Asser's statement, that it was not until the year 887 that Alfred began, on the same day, to read and interpret. That he could write as well as read when a boy, charters bearing his signature as early as 862, in the form, "I, Alfred, brother to the King, have consented and subscribed," clearly prove. It was probably, however, in the month of November 887 that he began that series of books for his people which form, after all, his most enduring monument. But for Alfred's works the Anglo-Saxon spoken in the ninth century might never have reached us at all. When he was a boy the literature of his mother-tongue consisted of a few poems, such as those of Cædmon and Adhelm, sung by the people, and handed down from father to son, for even Bede had written his great work in Latin. When Alfred died he left all those of his people who could read versions of the best historical, philosophical, and religious works which the times afforded in their own mother-tongue.

Notwithstanding the evidence from the several prefaces to the works themselves, and from the passages interpolated in the text, which contain direct references to himself, and could scarcely have been written by any other person, it is almost beyond belief that he could have translated, paraphrased, and adapted all the books which are generally attributed to him. The pressure of public business of all kinds in the last fifteen years of his life, and the interruption of the invasion of Hasting, which must have put a stop to his literary work altogether for three years, make it almost a physical impossibility; and we are driven to the conclusion that Plegmund, Asser, and his chaplains must have done great part of the work under his immediate direction and supervision. The wisdom and breadth of his views will be seen best by a short notice of the most celebrated of the works which he left to his people. But the most fitting introduction to these will be the account given by Asser of the interview which at last turned the King to literary work.

"On a certain day," the Bishop writes, "we were both sitting in the King's chamber, talking on all kinds of subjects as usual, and it happened that I read to him a quotation out of a certain book. He heard it attentively with both his ears, and addressed me with a thoughtful mind, showing me at the same moment a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein the daily courses, and psalms, and prayers which he had read in his youth were written, and he commanded me to write the same quotation in that book.

Hearing this, and perceiving his ingenuous benevolence, and devout desire of studying the words of divine wisdom, I gave, though in secret, boundless thanks to Almighty God, who had implanted such a love of wisdom in the King's heart. But I could not find any empty space in that book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters; wherefore I made a little delay, principally that I might stir up the bright intellect of the King to a higher acquaintance with the divine testimonies. Upon his urging me to make haste and write it quickly, I said to him, 'Are you willing that I should write that quotation on some leaf apart? For it is not certain whether we shall not find one or more other such extracts which will please you; and if that should so happen, we shall be glad that we have kept them apart.' 'Your plan is good,' said he; and I gladly made haste to get ready a sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me; and on that same day I wrote therein, as I had anticipated, no less than three other quotations which pleased him; and from that time we daily talked together, and found out other quotations which pleased him, so that the sheet became full, and deservedly so; according as it is written, 'The just man builds upon a moderate foundation, and by degrees passes to greater things.' Thus, like a most productive bee, he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many various flowers of divine Scripture with which he thickly stored the cells of his mind.

"Now when that first quotation was copied, he was eager at once to read, and to interpret in Saxon, and then to teach others. The King, inspired by God, began to study the rudiments of divine Scripture on the sacred solemnity of St. Martin [Nov. 11], and he continued to learn the flowers collected by certain masters, and to reduce them into the form of one book, as he was then able, although mixed one with another, until it became almost as large as a psalter. This book he called his ENCHIRIDION or MANUAL [HANDBOOK], because he carefully kept it at hand day and night, and found, as he told me, no small consolation therein."

This handbook is unfortunately lost, and the only authentic notices of its contents are two passages in William of Malmesbury's "Life of Bishop Aldhelm." From these it would seem that the handbook was not a mere commonplace book of passages copied from the books of famous authors, but that Alfred was himself gathering in it materials for a history of his country. The first passage cited merely corrects a statement that Bishop Aldhelm was the nephew of King Ina. The second relates how "King Alfred mentions, that a popular song which was still sung in the streets was composed by Aldhelm; adding the reason why such a man occupied himself with things which appear to be frivolous. The people at that time being half barbarians, and caring very little about church sermons, used to run home as soon as mass had been chanted. For this reason the holy man would stand on a bridge which leads from the town

to the country, and would meet them on their way home like one whose profession is the art of singing. Having done so more than once, he obtained the favour of the people, who flocked round him. Mixing by this device by and by the words of Holy Scripture with his playful songs, he led the people back to a proper life. Whereas, if he had preferred to act severely, and by excommunication, he would never have gained anything by it." This one specimen of the handbook which remains to us must heighten our regret at the loss of the remainder.

THE HISTORY OF OROSIUS.

The most arduous of all the King's literary labours must have been the reproduction of "The Universal History of Paulus Orosius" in Anglo-Saxon, for Alfred's work can scarcely be called a translation. He abridges, paraphrases, or enlarges at discretion, often leaving out whole chapters, and in places inserting entirely new matter. The scope of the work is summed up by its author in a passage of the forty-third chapter of the last book (which Alfred has omitted) in which he addresses his friend St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. "I have now set out," writes Orosius, "by the help of Christ, and in obedience to your desire, O most blessed father Augustine, the lusts and punishments of sinful men, the conflicts of the ages, and the judgments of God, from the beginning of the world to the present time; that is to say, for 5617 years." This history had the highest

repute in Alfred's time, and for centuries afterwards, though it is not a compilation which would now interest any but curious readers.

Orosius was born in Spain about A.D. 380, at Tarragona, and, like the great majority of the most active intellects of his day, took Orders early in life. The idea of the Universal History was suggested to him by St. Augustine, who appreciated the industry and ability of the young Spanish priest, and wished for his help in the work which he was himself engaged upon. This was his treatise "De civitate Dei," intended to refute the scandalous assertions of pagan Romans, that Christianity had injured mankind rather than benefited them. These writers founded their argument on the misfortunes which had befallen the Empire, and particularly on the recent sack of Rome by Alaric (A.D. 410). All these they attributed to Christianity, maintaining that since Christ's coming there had been no prosperity or victories for Rome, whose glory and empire had miserably declined. In his "City of God" Augustine was himself showing, from the history of the Church, that the world was the better for Revelation. Having come already to his tenth book, the good Bishop seems to have become conscious of a weak point in his line of defence. In order to prove his case, the world as well as the Church must be called as a witness; and Orosius undertook this part of the task by his desire.

The young Spaniard had already proved himself an able penman in a commentary on the heresies

of Priscillian and Origen. Augustine's opinion of him appears in the letter of introduction with which, in A.D. 415, he sent him to St. Jerome, who was then living at Bethlehem preparing his translation of the Scriptures, which has since become the Vulgate. Notwithstanding his successful commentary, it would seem there were points as to the nature and origin of the soul on which Orosius was not sure of his own ground. Augustine, with the utmost frankness, admits his own inability to clear them up, and so sends the young man on to the greatest living scholar, writing of him, "Behold there has come to me a godly young man, in catholic peace a brother, in age a son, in rank a co-presbyter, Orosius by name—of active talents, ready eloquence, ardent industry, longing to be in God's house a vessel useful for disproving false and destructive doctrines, which have destroyed the souls of the Spaniards more grievously than the swords of the heathen their bodies. He has hastened hither from the shore of the ocean, hoping to learn from me whatever of these matters he wished to know; but he has not reaped the fruit of his labour. First I desired him not to trust too much to fame respecting me; next I taught him what I could, and what I could not I told him where he might learn, and advised him to come to you. As he has willingly acceded to my advice, or command, I have asked him on his leaving you that he would come to us on his way home." On his return to Africa, Orosius compiled his History of the World from Adam to Alaric, dedi-

cating it to St. Augustine. It must have been a work of extraordinary labour, having regard to the opportunities and materials at his command, but is now only interesting as a curiosity. Mindful of the object of St. Augustine, Orosius sprinkles his narration here and there with moral Christian sentiments, as when he comes to Busiris sacrificing strangers: "I would now that those would answer me who say that this world is now worse under Christianity than it was under heathendom. Where is there now in any part of Christendom that men need dread amongst themselves to be sacrificed to any gods?" or again when speaking of Phalaris' bull: "Why do men complain of these Christian times, and say that they are worse than former times, when though they were with those kings doing evil at their desire, they might yet find no mercy from them? But now kings and emperors, though a man sin against their will, yet, for love of God, grant forgiveness according to the degree of guilt." For the rest, the History rambles about from country to country, in a gossiping, unconnected manner; and, though probably the best account of human affairs available to Alfred, would scarcely detain us but for the additions which he has made to the text.

Of these, by far the most remarkable are the accounts of the Northern voyages of Othere and Wulfstan, two of Alfred's sea-captains. Orosius' first book is devoted to the geography of the world, and gives the boundaries of the three continents, and some description of the countries and people who inhabit

them, until he comes to the Swedes. Then Alfred abruptly leaves the text of Orosius, having himself something much more satisfactory as to those Northern parts to set before his people. "Othere told his lord, King Alfred," he breaks in, "that he dwelt northward of all the Northmen. He said that he dwelt in the land to the northward, along the west sea; he said, however, that that land is very long north from thence, but it is all waste except in a few places where the Fins here and there dwell, for hunting in the winter, and in the summer for fishing in that sea." Then follows the description of Othere's famous Northern voyage, on which he started with the true instincts of an explorer, wishing to know how far the land extended to the North, and whether any one lived on the other side of the waste. The description is minute of the number of days' sail which the old Northman made, but where he went precisely has puzzled all the scholars who have ever examined the question to decide. It seems clear, however, that he actually sailed round the North Cape, and down into the White Sea, and that Alfred means to include the whole of Europe north of the Danube in the word Germania. The only people Othere finds in Scandinavia are, the Fins, and Beormas: the former letting their lands lie waste, and subsisting on fishing, fowling, and hunting; the latter having well-cultivated lands. Othere found in these parts whales with "very noble bones in their teeth," some of which he brought to the King, and ship-ropes made of their hides. But he thought little of this species of whale, as he calls them, having far better

whale-hunting in his own country, where the whales are most of them fifty ells long. Of these, he said, he and five others had killed sixty in two days.

Othere told his king further of his own home in "the shire called Halgoland," and how he had 600 tame reindeer of his own, six of which were decoy-deer, very valuable. Alfred adds that he was one of the first men of that country, "but had not more than twenty horned cattle, and twenty sheep, and twenty swine; and the little that he ploughed, he ploughed with horses." But the wealth of Othere and the other great men of those parts, the King adds, comes for the most part from rent paid by the Fins—for what does not appear, so we may suppose that it was for permission to live, and hunt, and fish. This rent "is in skins of animals, and birds' feathers, and in whalebone, and in ships' ropes made of whales' hide, and of seals." Every man pays according to his birth: "the best born, it is said, pay the skins of fifteen martens, and five reindeers, and one bear-skin, ten ambers of feathers, a bear's or otter's skin kyrtle, and two ship-ropes, each sixty ells long."

Wulfstan's voyage from Sleswig to the mouth of the Vistula follows, with gossip worthy of Herodotus as to the Esthonians, or inhabitants of Eastland, who lived at the junction of the "Elbing" with that river:—"Eastland is very large, and there are in it many towns, and in every town a king; and there is also great abundance of honey and fish; and the king and the richest men drink mares' milk, and the poor and the slaves drink mead. They have many contests amongst themselves; and there is no ale brewed

among the Esthonians, for there is mead enough." These Esthonians, Alfred notes from Wulfstan, have the strangest customs with respect to burials and successions. The bodies of dead men are kept unburnt as long as possible by the relatives, according to their wealth; kings and other great people lying in state for half a year. They are able to manage this because among the Esthonians "there is a tribe which can produce cold, and so the dead in whom they produce that cold lie very long there and do not putrefy; and if any one sets two vessels full of ale or water, they contrive that one shall be frozen, be it summer or be it winter." It is this discovery which enables the funerals of great men to be postponed for long intervals, according to the riches of the deceased. All the while the body is above ground there are drinking and sports, which last till the day of burial or burning, as the case may be. "On that day they divide the dead man's property into five or six portions, according to value, and place it out, the largest portion about a mile from the dwelling where the dead man lies, then another, then a third, and so on till it is all laid within the mile. Then all the neighbours within five or six miles who have swift horses, meet and ride towards the property; and he who has the swiftest horse comes to the first and largest portion, and so each after other till the whole is taken; and he takes the least portion who takes that which is nearest the dwelling: and then every one rides away with the property, and they may have it all; and on this account swift horses are there excessively dear,"—as we should conjecture.

But although such accounts of the customs and habits of the people amongst whom his captains went are duly set down by Alfred, his main object in this part of the work is to lay down the geography of Germany, the cradle of his own race, as accurately as possible. The longest of the other additions by Alfred to his author's text is the description of a Roman triumph; but there are a great number of smaller additions, such as the reference to the climate of Ireland, which Alfred says is warmer than that of England, and the fixing of the spot where Cæsar crossed the Thames at Wallingford. Again, he omits constantly whatever in his judgment was immaterial, thus in all ways aiming to make his book as useful as possible for those whom it was his chief aim in all his literary work to raise and instruct.

BEDE'S "ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY."

The next important work which bears the King's name is the translation of Bede's "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation." Bede was "mass-priest of the monastery of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, which is at Were Mouth," and his famous history extends from the landing of Julius Cæsar to the year 731, when Keolwulf—to whom the book is dedicated as one "very careful of old men's words and deeds, and most of all of the great men of our nation"—was king of Northumbria. In that time of peace "many in the kingdom of Northumbria, both noble and ignoble, yearn more," Bede tells his king, "to give

themselves and their children to monasteries and to God's service, than they exercise worldly warfare. What end the thing is to have, the coming age will see and behold." We have partly seen what came of it a century later. Alfred treated the Ecclesiastical History in the same manner as he had treated Orosius; freely omitting, and abridging; and correcting when his own knowledge as a West Saxon was more accurate than that of the venerable mass-priest, who had probably never wandered fifty miles from the monastery at Were Mouth.

BOETHIUS.

The "Consolations of Philosophy," which Alfred also translated, forms a striking contrast to the two historical works already noticed. Gibbon calls it "a golden book, not unworthy the leisure of Plato or Tully;" and Dr. Hook, "the handbook of the Middle Ages, for all who united piety with philosophy;" and it has had two other illustrious English translators—Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth.

Boethius was a pious and learned Roman senator, who was consul A.D. 487, two years before the invasion of Italy by Theodoric the Ostrogoth. For many years he continued in favour at court, and lived to see the consulate of his sons. But he incurred the anger of Theodoric for an attack on the Arian heresy, and for the boldness with which he maintained the ancient rights of the senate, and was banished from Rome, and imprisoned at Pavia. Here, before his execution, A.D. 526, he wrote the "Consolations," in the form of

a dialogue between himself, or his mind, and Wisdom, or Reason. The burden of the work is, that every fortune is good for men, whether it seem good to them or evil, and that we ought with all our power to inquire after God every man according to the measure of his understanding, a philosophy which Alfred's whole life illustrated, and which he was naturally anxious to impress upon his people.

There is a short preface to the King's version, which is held by Dr. Pauli to be the work of some other hand; but if not by Alfred, it is full of the manliness and humility which distinguished him, and explains so well the method of all his literary work, that it cannot be omitted here:—

"King Alfred was translator of this book, and turned it from book-Latin into English, as it is now done. Sometimes he set word by word, sometimes meaning by meaning, as he the most plainly and most clearly could explain it, for the various and manifold worldly occupations which often busied him both in mind and in body. The occupations are to us very difficult to be numbered which in his days came upon the kingdom which he had undertaken, and yet when he had learned this book, and turned it from the Latin into the English language, he afterwards composed it in verse, as it is now done. And he now prays, and for God's name implores every one of those who list to read this book, that he would pray for him, and not blame him, if he more rightly understand it than he could. For every man must, according to the measure of his understanding, and according to

his leisure, speak that which he speaketh, and do that which he doeth."

There is extant a translation of Boethius into Saxon verse, as mentioned in this preface, but it would seem, in the judgment of the best scholars, not to have been the work of Alfred.

GREGORY'S PASTORAL.

Gregory's "Pastoral Care" was also translated by the King; to it is prefixed the introduction addressed by him to Bishop Werefrith, from which quotations have been already made. It commences with a description of the sad decay of learning in England, and an exhortation to the Bishop that he, who is at leisure from the things of this world, will bestow the wisdom which God has given him wherever he is able to bestow it. "Think what punishment shall come upon us on account of this world, when we have not ourselves loved it in the least degree, or enabled other men so to do. We have had the name alone of Christians, and very few of the virtues. When I then called to mind all this, then I remembered how I saw, ere that all in them was laid waste and burnt up, how the churches throughout all the English race stood filled with treasures and books, and also a great multitude of God's servants; but they knew very little use of those books, for that they could not understand anything of them, because they were not written in their own language, such as they our elders spoke." The King goes on to wonder why those good and wise men, who loved wisdom themselves,

and got wealth and left it, had never been willing to turn any of the books they knew so well into their own language. But he soon answered himself that they must have left it undone of set purpose, that there might be more wisdom and knowledge of languages in the land. However, he will do what he can now to remedy all this. "Wherefore I think it better, if it also appears so to you, that we two should translate some books, which are the most necessary for all men to understand; that we should turn these into that tongue which we all can know, and so bring it about, as we very easily may, with God's help, if we have rest, that all the youth that now is among the English race, of free men, that have property, so that they can apply themselves to these things, may be committed to others for the sake of instruction, so long as they have no power for any other employments, until the time that they may know well how to read English writing. Let men afterwards further teach them Latin, those whom they are willing further to teach, and whom they wish to advance to a higher state.

"When I then called to mind how the learning of the Latin tongue before this was fallen away throughout the English race, though many knew how to read writing in English; then began I, among other unlike and manifold businesses of this kingdom, to turn into English the book that is named in Latin 'Pastoralis,' and in English the 'Hind's book,' one-while word for word, another-while meaning for meaning, so far as I learned it with Phlegmund my archbishop, and

with Asser my bishop, and with Grimbold my mass-priest, and with John my mass-priest. After I had then learned them, so that I understood them, and so that I might read them with the fullest comprehension, I turned them into English, and to each bishop's see in my kingdom will send one, and on each is an 'æstel,' that is of the value of fifty mancuses, and I bid, in God's name, that no man undo the æstel from the books, nor the books from the minster. It is unknown how long there may be so learned bishops as now, thank God, are everywhere. For this, I would that they always should be at their place, unless the bishop will have them with him, or they be anywhere lent, or some one write others by them."

There are several manuscript copies of the "Pastoral Care" in Anglo-Saxon in the public libraries of the country, which are supposed to be some of those referred to in Alfred's introduction as having been sent by him as presents to his bishops. The æstel, worth fifty mancuses, which accompanied each copy, has disappeared. Alfred, to judge from the care with which he provided for its circulation, places more value on this than on any other of his works. To us it is, perhaps, the least valuable, being occupied chiefly with the difficulty and importance of the teacher's or priest's office, the danger of filling it unworthily, and the duty of all who are thoroughly competent to undertake it to do so, bearing in mind that he who is himself under the dominion of evil habits makes a bad intercessor for, or teacher of, other men.

BLOSSOM GATHERINGS FROM ST. AUGUSTINE.

The "sayings which King Alfred gathered" out of the writings of St. Augustine are perhaps the most instructive of all his works, as they show best where his natural bent carried him, and what he himself valued most, and desired most to give to his people. His own portion of the work consists of some three clauses of introductory matter. These begin so abruptly, that it is supposed that some sentences are lost. Alfred describes himself as in a wood full of comely trees, fit for javelins and stud shafts, and helves to all tools, and bay timbers and bolt timbers. "In every tree I saw something," the King writes, "which I needed at home, therefore I advise every one who is able, and has many wains, that he trade to the same wood where I cut the stud shafts, and there fetch more for himself, and load his wain with fair rods, that he may wind many a neat wall, and set many a comely house, and build many a fair town of them; and thereby may dwell merrily and softly, so as I now yet have not done. But He who taught me, to whom the wood was agreeable, he may make me to dwell more softly in this temporary cottage, the while that I am in this world, and also in the everlasting home which He has promised us through St. Augustine, and St. Gregory, and St. Jerome, and through many other holy fathers; as I believe also that for the merits of all these He will make the way more convenient than it was before, and especially enlighten the eyes of my mind, so that I may search out the right way to the

everlasting home and the everlasting glory, and the everlasting rest which is promised us through those holy fathers. May it be so!" Then he reverts to his original idea of working in a wood. "It is no wonder though men swink in timber working, and in the carrying and the building: but every man wishes, after he has built a cottage on his lord's lease by his help, that he may sometimes rest him therein, and hunt, and fowl, and fish, and use it every way under the lease, both on water and on land, until the time that he earn book-land and everlasting heritage through his lord's mercy. So do the wealthy Giver, who wields both these temporary cottages and the eternal homes. May He who shaped both, and wields both, grant me that I be meet for each, both here to be profitable and thither to come!" There is something very touching in this opening, in which Alfred allows his fancy to play round the idea of a woodman, like one of his own churls, cutting timber for his house and his weapons, and building on his lord's land, in the hope of one day realizing the object of every Saxon man's ambition, a permanent dwelling, bookland of his own; and in the side-glance at his own life of incessant toil, and longing for a home where a man may dwell "merrily and softly" in summer and winter, "so as I now yet have not done." It is only a glance which he allows himself, and then the strong fighter turns back to his work, trusting that He who has shaped and wields both lives may grant him "both here to be profitable and thither to come." One more short passage introduces his gatherings to those for whom they were

made. "Augustine, Bishop of Carthage," he writes, "wrought two books about his own mind. The books are called 'Soliloquiorum,' that is, of his mind's musing and doubting, how his reason answered his mind when his mind doubted about anything, or wished to know anything which it could not understand before."

The "blossom gatherings" all bear upon the problem with which Alfred then opens them, by the quotation of St. Augustine's saying, "that his mind went often asking of and searching out various and rare things, and most of all about himself, what he was: whether his mind and his soul were mortal and perishing, or ever living and eternal; and again about his good, what it was, and what good it were best for him to do, and what evil to avoid."

THE KING'S PROVERBS.

The last of the works attributed to Alfred which need be specially mentioned, is the collection of proverbs, or sayings, in verse and prose, found amongst the Cotton manuscripts. It is a compilation of much later date than the ninth century, written in a broken dialect, between the original Saxon and English. The compiler has put together some thirty-one stanzas and paragraphs, each of which begins, "Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort," or "England's herdsman," or "England's darling," and the collection is prefaced by a short notice in verse of the occasion on which the sayings are supposed to have been spoken.

"At Sifford there sate many thanes,
Many bishops, many learned,
With earls, and awful knights;
There was Earl Alfrich very learned in the law;
There also was Alfred, England's herdsman,
England's darling;
He was king of England, he taught them,
All who could hear him,
How they should lead their lives.
Alfred was a king of England, that was very strong.
He was both king and scholar, he loved well God's work;
He was wise and advised in his talk;
He was the wisest man that was in all England."

This introduction would seem to point to some particular witan, held probably at Seaford, or Shifford, near Bampton, in Oxfordshire, the tradition of which was still fresh. There is no mention in the Saxon Chronicle, or elsewhere, of any such assembly, but some of the sayings bear a strong resemblance to parts of Alfred's writings, and may have been accurately handed down and reported. A specimen or two will be enough. The opening saying runs:—

"Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort:
Oh that you would now love and long after your Lord!
He would govern you wisely,
That you might have honour in this world
And yet unite your souls to Christ."

Then come a series of instructions to kings and officers of state, on the education of young men and children, and on the use of wealth, in which the King, speaking to his nobles and to his children, enforces the direct responsibility of all men to Christ, and the worthlessness of wealth unless discreetly used,

—old ideas enough, a thousand years ago, and as needful of repetition then as now.

> "Thus quoth Alfred, England's comfort; the earl
> And the Atheling are under the king,
> To govern the land according to law;
> The priest and the knight must both alike judge uprightly;
> For as a man sows
> So shall he reap,
> And every man's judgment comes home to-him to his own doors."

In almost the last of the series, the King addresses his son:

"Thus quoth Alfred: My dear son, sit thou now beside me, and I will deliver thee true instruction. My son, I feel that my hour is near, my face is pale, my days are nearly run. We must soon part. I shall to another world, and thou shalt be left alone with all my wealth. I pray thee, for thou art my dear child, strive to be a father and a lord to thy people; be thou the children's father, and the widow's friend; comfort thou the poor and shelter the weak, and with all thy might right that which is wrong. And, my son, govern thyself by law, then shall the Lord love thee, and God above all things shall be thy reward. Call thou upon Him to advise thee in all thy need, and so He shall help thee the better to compass that which thou wouldest."

Besides the works already mentioned, there is a long list of original writings and translations attributed to Alfred. Of the former, Spelman gives ten, including "selections from the laws of the Greeks, Britons, Saxons, and Danes," and original treatises

"against unjust judges," on "the uncertain fortunes of kings," and "the acts of magistrates," and "a manual of meditations." Of the latter, the "Dialogues of Pope Gregory," and translations of parts of the Scriptures, are the only works of his as to which there is anything like a concurrence of testimony, and it is more than probable that the former was the work of Bishop Werefrith under Alfred's supervision. An old manuscript history of Ely is the authority for the statement that he translated the whole of the Old and New Testaments into Saxon; but the better opinion seems to be, that the Psalms were the only portions of the Scriptures which he undertook to translate, and that he was at work on his Saxon Psalter at the time of his death.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KING'S DEATH AND WILL.

"A good life hath few years, but a good name endureth for ever."
"Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years.

THE world's hardest workers and noblest benefactors have rarely been long-lived. The constant wear and stress of such a life as Alfred's must tell its tale, and the wonder is, not that he should have broken down so soon, but that he should have borne the strain so long.

In the fifty-fourth year of his age, "six days before All-Hallowmass," or on the 26th of October, 901, "died Alfred, the son of Ethelwulf. He was king over the whole English nation, except that part which was under the dominion of the Danes, and he held the kingdom a year and a half less than thirty years, and then Edward, his son, succeeded him." Such is the simple account of the great King's ending in the Saxon Chronicle. It understates the length of his reign by a year. Florence and the other chroniclers tell us nothing more, except that his body was buried in the new monastery at Winchester, which he had himself founded, and which his son was destined to finish.

We know neither the place or cause of his death; and there is some dispute as to his burial-place. Some of the chroniclers name the church of St. Peter; others, the New Minster monastery. The conflicting accounts are reconciled by a story, that the canons of the cathedral church, from jealousy of Grimbald and the monks of the new monastery, declared that the spirit of Alfred could not rest, but might be seen wandering at night within their precincts; whereupon Edward at once removed his father's coffin to the monastery. In the time of Henry I. when the abbey of New Minster was removed to Hyde from the immediate neighbourhood of the cathedral, Alfred's remains were carried with them, and there rested till the Reformation, when the royal tombs were broken open at the dissolution of the monastery. But the "pious Dr. Richard Fox," bishop of Winchester, had the remains of the kings collected carefully and put into chests of lead, with inscriptions on each of them, showing whose bones were within; and the chests were placed, under his supervision, on the top of a wall of rare workmanship, which he was building to enclose the presbytery of the cathedral. Here the dust of the great King rested till the taking of Winchester by the Parliamentary troops, under Sir William Waller, on the 14th of December, 1642. The Puritan soldiers, amongst other outrages, threw down and broke open Bishop Fox's leaden chests, and scattered the contents all over the cathedral. When the first excitement of the troops had cooled down, what were left of the bones of our early kings were reverently collected,

and carried to Oxford and "lodged in a repository building next the public library."

The country had enjoyed such profound peace for the four years preceding the King's death, that for two of them the Saxon Chronicle has no entry at all, and only mentions the deaths of the Alderman of Wiltshire, and the Bishop of London, in 898. In Simeon's Chronicle it is stated that Bishop Eardulf, who had carried the remains of St. Cuthbert about for nine years through the northern counties, hiding from King Halfdene's robber troops, and who had at last been able to deposit them in a shrine of his own cathedral, died in the same year with Alfred. It is pleasant to know that our "most noble miser of his time" must have seen of the travail of his soul and been satisfied in those last years. His grievous disease had abated in his forty-fifth year, and he closed his eyes on peace at home and abroad, in church and state, abundance in the field and in the stall, and order and justice established in every corner of his kingdom: "His name shall endure under the sun amongst the posterities, and all the people shall praise him."

The last monument of his justice and patriotism is his will, of which happily a perfect copy was preserved in the archives of the abbey of New Minster. The opening recitals have been already quoted. They show how anxious he was that the memory of the agreement between himself and his brother should be kept alive; and now, in pursuance of that agreement, he devises eight manors to Ætheline, the

elder son of his brother Ethelward; and to Ethelwald, the younger, the manors of Guildford, Godalming, and Steyning. The principal part of his lands in Wilts and Somersetshire, including the famous royal burgh of Wedmore, he leaves to Edward, coupled with a touching reference to some arrangement which he had made at some time with his tenants at Cheddar: "And I am a petitioner to the families at Ceodre, that they will choose him (Edward) on the conditions that we had formerly expressed." All his other children have gifts of manors, and to his wife he leaves the manors of Wantage, Lambourn, and Ethandune. The field of Ashdown is scarcely three miles from Lambourn, and may well have been included in that manor. If this be so, the King left to his faithful helpmate, his birthplace, and the scenes of his two great victories.

His personalty is also distributed justly and munificently. To each of his sons he leaves 500 pounds; to his wife and daughters, 100 pounds each. To each of his aldermen and his nephews, 100 mancuses; and to Ethelred, a sword of the value of 100 mancuses. Like legacies are left to Archbishop Ethelred, and to Bishops Werefrith and Asser. Then turning to his servants and the poor, he bequeaths "200 pounds for those men that follow me, to whom I now at Eastertide give money," to be divided between them after the manner that he had up to this time distributed to them. "Also," he continues, "let them distribute for me, and for my father, and for the friends that he interceded for, and I intercede for, 200 pounds,

50 to the mass-priests over all my kingdom, 50 to the poor ministers of God, 50 to the distressed poor, 50 to the church that I shall rest at. And I know not certainly whether there be so much money; nor I know not but that there may be more, but so I suppose. If it be more, be it all common to them to whom I have bequeathed money. And I will that my aldermen, and councillors, be all there together and so distribute it."

He then declares that in former times, when he had more property and more relations, he had made other wills which he had burned, all at least that he could recover. If any of these should be found, let it stand for nothing. And he wills that all those who are in possession of any of the lands disposed of by his father's will should fulfil the intentions there expressed the soonest they may, and that if any debt of his remains outstanding his relations should pay it.

Then follows the passage on the strength of which Alfred is cited as the author of entails in England: "And I will that the men to whom I have given my book-lands do not give it from my kindred after their day, but I will that it go unto the highest hand to me unless any one of them have children, then it is to me most agreeable that it go to that issue on the male side so long as any be worthy. My grandfather gave his lands to the spear side, not to the spindle side. Wherefore if I have given to any woman what he had acquired, then let my relations redeem it, if they will have it, while she is living; if otherwise, let

it go after their day as we have determined. For this reason I ordain that they pay for it, because they will succeed to my estates, which I may give either to the spindle side or the spear side, as I will."

Lastly, he is mindful of the slaves on his lands, whose condition he had greatly improved, but whom he had not been able entirely to free. "And I beseech, in God's name, and in His saints', that none of my relations do obstruct none of the freedom of those I have redeemed. And for me the West Saxon nobles have pronounced as lawful, that I may leave them free or bond, whether I will. But I, for God's love and my soul's health, will that they be masters of their freedom and of their will; and I, in the living God's name, entreat that no man do not disturb them, neither by money exaction, nor by no manner of means, that they may not choose such man as they will. And I will that they restore to the families at Domerham their land deeds and their free liberty, such master to choose as may to them be most agreeable, for my sake, and for Ethelfleda's, and for the friends that she did intercede for, and I do intercede for." These Domerham families of churls would seem to have dwelt on some estate in which the lady of Mercia was jointly interested with her father. "And let them" (my relations and beneficiaries) "seek also with a living price for my soul's health, as it may be and is most fitting, and as ye to forgive me shall be disposed."

These are the last words which "England's Shep-

herd" left to his country. It is no easy task for any one who has been studying his life and works to set reasonable bounds to their reverence, and enthusiasm, for the man. Lest the reader should think my estimate tainted with the proverbial weakness of biographers for their heroes, let them turn to the words in which the earliest, and the last of the English historians of that time, sum up the character of Alfred. Florence of Worcester, writing in the century after his death, speaks of him as "that famous, warlike, victorious king; the zealous protector of widows, scholars, orphans, and the poor; skilled in the Saxon poets; affable and liberal to all; endowed with prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance; most patient under the infirmity which he daily suffered; a most stern inquisitor in executing justice; vigilant and devoted in the service of God." Mr. Freeman, in his "History of the Norman Conquest," has laid down the portrait in bold and lasting colours, in a passage as truthful as it is eloquent, which those who are familiar with it will be glad to meet again, while those who do not know it will be grateful to me for substituting for any poor words of my own.

"Alfred, the unwilling author of these great changes, is the most perfect character in history. He is a singular instance of a prince who has become a hero of romance, who, as such, has had countless imaginary exploits attributed to him, but to whose character romance has done no more than justice, and who appears in exactly the same light in history and in fable. No other man on record has ever so thoroughly

united all the virtues both of the ruler and of the private man. In no other man on record were so many virtues disfigured by so little alloy. A saint without superstition, a scholar without ostentation, a warrior all whose wars were fought in the defence of his country, a conqueror whose laurels were never stained by cruelty, a prince never cast down by adversity, never lifted up to insolence in the day of triumph —there is no other name in history to compare with his. Saint Lewis comes nearest to him in the union of a more than monastic piety with the highest civil, military, and domestic virtues. Both of them stand forth in honourable contrast to the abject superstition of some other royal saints, who were so selfishly engaged in the care of their own souls that they refused either to raise up heirs for their throne, or to strike a blow on behalf of their people. But even in Saint Lewis we see a disposition to forsake an immediate sphere of duty for the sake of distant and unprofitable, however pious and glorious, undertakings. The true duties of the King of the French clearly lay in France, and not in Egypt or Tunis. No such charge lies at the door of the great King of the West Saxons. With an inquiring spirit which took in the whole world, for purposes alike of scientific inquiry and of Christian benevolence, Alfred never forgot that his first duty was to his own people. He forestalled our own age in sending expeditions to explore the Northern Ocean, and in sending alms to the distant Churches of India; but he neither forsook his crown, like some of his predecessors, nor neglected his duties,

like some of his successors. The virtue of Alfred, like the virtue of Washington, consisted in no marvellous displays of superhuman genius, but in the simple, straightforward discharge of the duty of the moment. But Washington, soldier, statesman, and patriot, like Alfred, has no claim to Alfred's further characters of saint and scholar. William the Silent, too, has nothing to set against Alfred's literary merits; and in his career, glorious as it is, there is an element of intrigue and chicanery utterly alien to the noble simplicity of both Alfred and Washington. The same union of zeal for religion and learning with the highest gifts of the warrior and the statesman is found, on a wider field of action, in Charles the Great. But even Charles cannot aspire to the pure glory of Alfred. Amidst all the splendour of conquest and legislation, we cannot be blind to an alloy of personal ambition, of personal vice, to occasional unjust aggressions and occasional acts of cruelty. Among our own later princes, the great Edward alone can bear for a moment the comparison with his glorious ancestor. And, when tried by such a standard, even the great Edward fails. Even in him we do not see the same wonderful union of gifts and virtues which so seldom meet together; we cannot acquit Edward of occasional acts of violence, of occasional recklessness as to means; we cannot attribute to him the pure, simple, almost childlike disinterestedness which marks the character of Alfred."

Let Wordsworth, on behalf of the poets of England complete the picture.

" Behold a pupil of the monkish gown,
The pious Alfred, king to justice dear!
Lord of the harp and liberating spear;
Mirror of princes! Indigent renown
Might range the starry ether for a crown
Equal to his deserts, who, like the year,
Pours forth his bounty, like the day doth cheer,
And awes like night, with mercy-tempered frown.
Ease from this noble miser of his time
No moment steals; pain narrows not his cares—
Though small his kingdom as a spark or gem,
Of Alfred boasts remote Jerusalem,
And Christian India, through her wide-spread clime,
In sacred converse gifts with Alfred shares."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE KING'S SUCCESSORS.

"A good man leaveth an inheritance unto his children's children."

THE death of Alfred was the signal for a revolt of his younger nephew Ethelwald, against the decision of the witan, who named Edward as his father's successor. Ethelwald was a reckless, violent man, who had scandalized the nation by taking to wife a nun, "without the King's leave, and against the Bishop's command." He seized the royal castles of Wimborne and Christchurch, and in the former the Chronicle tells us, "sat down with those who had submitted to him, and had obstructed all the approaches towards him, and said that he would do one of two things—or there live, or there lie. But, notwithstanding that, he stole away by night and sought the army in Northumbria, who received him as their over-lord, and became obedient to him."

This effort of Ethelwald only proved the soundness of the foundations of the kingdom which Alfred had laid. The Pretender fled from Wessex and Mercia without being able to break the peace, and was not heard of again for two years. In 904, however, he came with a fleet of Northmen to Essex, and a portion

of the Danish people there submitted to him. The next year he was strong enough to attack his cousin, and penetrated through Mercia to the Thames, which he crossed at Cricklade, and committed some depredations in Berkshire. Edward was not in time to catch him in Wessex, and so followed him with a strong force across Watling Street, into East Anglia, and there overran "all the land between the dikes and the Ouse, as far north as the fens." Not having been able to bring Ethelwald to an action, Edward turned south again, and, being in an enemy's country, and in face of a strong army, "proclaimed through his whole force that they should all return together. Then the Kentish men remained there behind, notwithstanding his orders, and seven messengers he had sent to them;" and, Ethelwald falling on them, a general action was brought on, in which the loss on both sides was very great, but on the Danish side both Ethelwald, and Eohric king of East Anglia, were slain, and soon afterwards Edward made peace with the East Angles and Northumbrians.

Ethelred of Mercia died in 910, and London and Oxford were incorporated in Wessex. In the next year the Danes broke the peace again, relying probably on the weakness of a woman's rule in Mercia. But the lady of Mercia proved as formidable an enemy as her lord. In concert with her brother she not only drove the Danes out of her own boundaries, but won from them, and made safe, one stronghold after another in the midland counties. Thus in 913, while Edward invaded Essex, and took and fortified

Hertford, "Ethelfleda, lady of the Mercians, went with all the Mercians to Tamworth, and there built a fortress early in the summer; and, before Lammas, another at Stafford."

Again, in 915, she fortifies Cherbury, Warburton, and Runcorn; in 916, defeats the Welsh, and storms Brecknock; and in 917, "God helping her, got possession of the fortress which is called Derby, and all that owed obedience thereto: and there within the gates were slain four of her thanes, which caused her much sorrow." Edward in the meanwhile was steadily extending his frontier, and gaining the allegiance of many Danish nobles, such as Thurkytel, the earl, who "sought to him to be his lord, and all the captains, and almost all the chief men who owed obedience to Bedford, and also many of those who owed obedience to Northampton." The lady of Mercia died in 918 at Tamworth, when the whole of Mercia came to Edward, whose niece Elfwina, the only child of Ethelred and Ethelfleda, came to her uncle's court in Wessex.

Thus the kingdom grew under his hand, disturbed frequently by raids of the Welsh and Danes, but on the whole steadily and surely. The North Welsh sought him to their over-lord in 922, and in 924 "the King of the Scots, and the whole nation of the Scots, and all those who dwelt in Northumbria, chose him for father and for lord."

In the next year he died, and Athelstan was elected by the witan, and consecrated at Kingston. Dunstan, who was fated to bring such misery on the royal family, and on the nation, was born in the same year.

For fifteen years Athelstan ruled with vigour and success, extending still the English frontiers. He gave the South Britons the Tamar instead of the Exe as their boundary, and occupied Northumbria himself after Sigtric, the king, had deserted his Saxon wife Edith, Athelstan's sister. In 937, Scots, Danes, Welsh, and a great host from Ireland, led by Anlaf, a son of Sigtric by a former marriage, made a desperate effort to shake off the over-lordship of Athelstan. Anlaf landed in the Humber, and after effecting a junction with his allies, laid siege to York, which was held for Athelstan. The siege was raised by the news of Athelstan's crossing the Humber on his march to the relief of the northern capital, and soon afterwards the battle of Brumby, near Beverley, was fought, in which the allies were utterly defeated and five kings slain. The victory was so complete, and of so great significance, that even the Saxon Chronicle breaks away from its usual severe matter-of-fact form into a song of triumph. A spirited poem, describing the battle, and singing the praises of Athelstan, and his young brother Edmund the Etheling, is given for the year 937. The ring of it is like the death-song of Regner Lodbrog, as it tells how

"West Saxons onward
Throughout the day
In bands
Pursued the footsteps
Of the loathed nations.
* * *
They had no cause to laugh
That they in war's works
The better men were
In the battle-stead
At the meeting of spears,
That they on the slaughter field
With Edward's offspring played."

and how

"King and Etheling
Both together
Their country sought,
West Saxon land;
Leaving behind them,
The corses to devour,
The yellow kite,
The swarthy raven
With horned nib,
And dusky 'pada,'
Erne white-tailed,
Greedy war-hawk,
And the grey beast
Wolf of the wood.
Carnage greater has not been
In this island
Ever yet,
Of people slain
By edge of sword;
As books us tell,
Old-writers,
Since from the East hither
Angles and Saxons
Came to land."

Edmund the Etheling succeeded his brother in 940, and on his death in 946, Edred, the youngest of the sons of Edward, was elected king; Edwi and Edgar, the sons of Edmund, being still minors. Both of these grandsons of Alfred pursued their father's policy, and Edred finally annexed Northumbria, and divided it into shires, over which he set his own earls. He died in 955.

Thus for two generations Alfred's descendants inherited his courage and ability, and carried on with signal success one part of his work. To quote Wordsworth's sonnets once more:—

"The race of Alfred covet glorious pains
When dangers threaten, dangers ever new,
Black tempests bursting, blacker still in view!
But manly sovereignty its hold retains:
The root sincere, the branches bold to strive
With the fierce tempest."

There is, unfortunately, little proof of the truth of the beautiful concluding lines,—

"While within the round
Of their protection gentle virtues thrive;
As oft, mid some green spot of open ground
Wide as the oak extends its dewy gloom
The fostered hyacinths spread their purple bloom."

Rather it would seem that in that half century, during which England had become one vast camp, the learning and the arts of peace which Alfred had so wisely and nobly fostered were fast slipping away from the people; and corruptions had again crept into monasteries and convents (enriched rapidly by the race of devout warrior princes), which rendered necessary the reforms of Dunstan and Bishop Ethelwald on the one hand, and led to the disastrous collisions between Church and State on the other. But we are not concerned with the later history, and it is only noticed thus far to show that the King's example continued to inspire his son and son's sons.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

"*Hear therefore, O ye kings, and understand; learn, ye that be judges of the ends of the earth.*

"*For power is given you of the Lord, and sovereignty from the Highest, who shall try your works, and search out your councils.*"

THE readers of this series are specially invited to look at the men and events which are brought before them from a religious point of view. That is the central idea of the books, and the writers may fairly assume that the public they are addressing is a Christian public. The controversy which has arisen again in our time, and is deeply stirring men's minds, as to the foundations of our faith—the question whether Christianity is or is not true—does not directly concern us here. That controversy must always be one of deep interest, even to Christians who take no part in it. We ought to welcome with all our hearts the searching scrutiny, which students and philosophers of all Christian nations, and of all shades of belief, whether Christian or not, are engaged upon, as to the facts on which our faith rests. The more thorough that scrutiny is, the better should we be pleased. We may not wholly agree with the last position which

the ablest investigators have laid down, that unless the truth of the history of our Lord—the facts of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension—can be proved by ordinary historical evidence, applied according to the most approved and latest methods, Christianity must be given up as not true. We know that our own certainty as to these facts does not rest on a critical historical investigation, while we rejoice that such an investigation should be made by those who have leisure, and who are competent for it. At the same time, as we also know that the methods and principles of historical investigation are constantly improving, and being better understood, and that the critics of the next generation will work, in all human likelihood, at as great an advantage in this inquiry over those who are now engaged in it, as our astronomers and natural philosophers enjoy over Newton and Franklin—and as new evidence may turn up any day which may greatly modify their conclusions—we cannot suppose that there is the least chance of their settling the controversy in our time. Nor, even if we thought them likely to arrive at definite conclusions, can we consent to wait the result of their investigations, important and interesting as these will be. Granting then cheerfully, that if these facts on the study of which they are engaged are not facts—if Christ was not crucified, and did not rise from the dead, and ascend to God His Father—there has been no revelation, and Christianity will infallibly go the way of all lies, either under their assaults or those of their successors—they must pardon us if

even at the cost of being thought and called fools for our pains, we deliberately elect to live our lives on the contrary assumption. It is useless to tell us that we know nothing of these things, that we *can* know nothing until their critical examination is over; we can only say, "Examine away; but we *do* know something of this matter, whatever you may assert to the contrary, and mean to live on that knowledge."

But while we cannot suspend our judgment on the question until we know how the critics and scholars have settled it, we must do justice, before passing on, to the single-mindedness, the reverence, the resolute desire for the truth before all things, wherever the search for it may land them, which characterises many of those who are no longer of our faith, and are engaged in this inquiry, or have set it aside as hopeless, and are working at other tasks. The great advance of natural science within the last few years, and the devotion with which many of our ablest and best men are throwing themselves into this study, are clearing the air in all the higher branches of human thought, and making possible a nation, and in the end a world, of truthful men—that blessedest result of all the strange conflicts and problems of the age, which the wisest men have foreseen in their most hopeful moods. In this grand movement even those who are nominally, and believe themselves to be really, against us, are for us; all at least who are truthful and patient workers. For them, too, the spirit of all truth, and patience, and wisdom is leading; and their strivings and victories—ay, and their backslidings

and reverses—are making clearer day by day that revelation of the kingdom of God in nature, through which it would seem that our generation, and those which are to follow us, will be led back again to that higher revelation of the kingdom of God in man.

Leaving then on one side the critical and historical inquiry, and starting from the assumption of the truth of revelation as commonly understood amongst us, and that Christ really was what He claimed to be, how does this bear on the question from which we started,—the kingship and government of the nations and people of the world in which we are living?

In order to answer the question to any good purpose for Englishmen, we must ascertain, if possible, what the common faith of English Christians is; and to do this we may fairly turn, in the first place, to the Church of England, which even yet speaks with some authority. Her formularies and teaching have stood now for three hundred years as the expression of the faith of the English nation. This is gathered up for ordinary persons in the Book of Common Prayer, which has been in constant use, on one day at least, in every week, of every year, in every parish in the land. We all know that, besides the forms of prayer contained in that book, which are common to all days, there are special prayers and services for each week, and for each festival, intended to direct the mind of the nation in the act of worship to some particular side of the truth which the Church teaches. Referring to these, we find in the services for all those seasons which we, in common with the rest of Christendom,

esteem most holy, one constant declaration as to the present actual existence of the kingdom of Christ, occurring over and over again. Thus, on the first day of the Christian year, Advent Sunday, we pray that we may cast away the works of darkness, and rise to the life immortal, "through Him who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever." On the Third Sunday in Advent, in the collect addressed directly to Christ himself, we pray that we may be found an acceptable people "in Thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end." On Christmas Day the same form occurs, and we are again testifying that Christ "liveth and reigneth." In the collect for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany we speak of "His eternal and glorious kingdom," where He "liveth and reigneth." And so again and again, at the beginning of Lent, through Easter Week, on the Day of Ascension, the Sunday after Ascension, Whitsunday, Trinity Sunday, we are still in the same key, repeating the same confession, and declaring in the most solemn manner, that Christ the Son of God has actually set up His kingdom in this world, and is, now and always, "living and reigning" in it.

In the same series of services the Church of England places before the people, day after day, and week after week, lessons and passages from the Old Testament, for their guidance and instruction, and these are associated with passages from the New Testament selected apparently for the express purpose of showing,

that the old covenant is not cancelled, but fulfilled and made perfect in the new. By this method we English churchmen have set before us in our childhood, and kept before us all our lives, that wonderful picture of a nation ruled directly by God himself, and prospering, or falling into misery and confusion, precisely as they acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge this rule which the Jewish history contains. Whatever government they set up for themselves, the same results follow. Kings, priests, judges, whatever men succeed to, or usurp, or are thrust into power, come immediately under that eternal government which the God of the nation has established, and the order of which cannot be violated with impunity. Every ruler who ignores or defies it saps the national life and prosperity, and brings trouble on his country, sometimes swiftly, but always surely. There is the perpetual presence of a King, with whom rulers and people must come to a reckoning in every national crisis and convulsion, and who is no less present when the course of affairs is quiet and prosperous. The greatest and wisest men of the nation are those in whom this faith burns most strongly. Elijah's solemn opening, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand;" David's pleading, "Whither shall I go then from Thy presence, or whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?"—his confession that in heaven or hell, or the uttermost parts of the sea, "there also shall Thy hand lead, and Thy right hand shall guide me,"—are only well-known instances of a universal consciousness which never

wholly leaves the men or the nation, however much they may struggle to get rid of it.

The English Church thus forces on the notice of her members the constant presence of God in the old world, and the reality of His government of the nations, even of those which were ignorant of Him. She labours to make clear to them the sacredness of the material earth, and the truth that not only on the hill of Zion, but in the desert, on the great waters, in the city, as well as in the hearts and minds of men, there was always a Divine presence dwelling. Then, through that unbroken series of services to which reference has been made already, she declares that this presence has not left the earth, is not dwelling less with us English than with the old Hebrews, but has come nearer to us since the Son of God took flesh, and revealed to men that King and Father under whose government they are living, and declared that He would be with them always, even to the end of the world.

This belief in this Divine government of the nations, which is thus wrought into the whole teaching and confession of the English Church, is probably held by all sects of nonconformists amongst us. Whatever their doctrines may be as to election and reprobation, or any of the other thousand and one shibboleths by which men's faith is tested, and too sorely tried, there is not one of them probably which, speaking authoritatively and deliberately, would not admit that Christ is "living and reigning," not only in the invisible, but here in the visible world, and that all rulers and

governments are directly subject, and responsible, to Him.

Turning from the Church to the nation, from teaching and theory to life and practice, we find at every step of our history the most striking confirmation of this witness. The revolt against all visible earthly authority in spiritual things, which had been smouldering for centuries, broke out in England, as elsewhere, at the time of the Reformation. Once for all, the nation then declared that they would have no man standing in the place of the King and Lord of their souls, and assuming to dispense with His laws; that they were not and would not be responsible to any vicar of Christ, but only to God himself; and Pope and priests, and all who supported them, must be taught this in the most direct and thorough manner. The English King was the true representative of the nation in this protest and revolt; and the moral sense and conscience of the nation was behind him. And so it was solemnly declared by the Act of Supremacy, that "for the increase of virtue in Christ's religion within this realm of England, the King our sovereign Lord, his heirs and successors kings of this realm, shall be the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England." This direct responsibility of the nation, and of the King as the nation's representative, to God, was the root idea and principle of the Reformation in England. The Tudor princes (with the exception of course of Queen Mary) in their best moods acknowledged it, and acted on it; and, while they did so, all went well. Whenever they or their successors forgot

it, again and again in the intervening 300 years, it has had to assert itself, often in the most unlooked-for ways, and by the strangest witnesses. And so it stands in our own day, the inheritance of many generations, as fresh, as clear, as strong as ever—a rock against which churches and sects may dash themselves, but which neither they, nor all the powers of earth, can shake.

Had our kings and rulers recognised that one great principle of the Reformation, that there can be no spiritual authority on earth with the power to dispense with God's law, and bind and loose man's consciences, the other great revolt might never have come at all. But the Reformation had to do its work in due course, in temporal as well as spiritual things, in the visible as in the invisible world; for the Stuart princes asserted in temporal matters the powers which the Pope had claimed in spiritual. They, too, would acknowledge the sanctity of no law above the will of princes—would vindicate, even with the sword and scaffold, their own power to dispense with laws. So the second great revolt and protest of the English nation came, against all visible earthly sovereignty in things temporal. Puritanism arose, and Charles went to the block, and the proclamation went forth that henceforth the nation would have no King but Christ; that He was the only possible King for the English nation from that time forth, in temporal as well as spiritual things, and that His kingdom had actually come. The national conscience was not with the Puritans as it had been with Henry

at the time of the Reformation, but the deepest part of their protest has held its own, and gained strength ever since, from their day to ours. The religious source and origin of it was, no doubt, thrust aside at the Revolution, but the sagacious statesmen of 1688 were as clear as the soldiers of Ireton and Ludlow in their resolve, that no human will should override the laws and customs of the realm. So they, too, required of their sovereigns that they should "solemnly promise and swear to govern the people of this kingdom of England, and the dominions thereto belonging, according to the statutes in Parliament agreed on, and the laws and customs of the same; . . . that they will to their power cause law and justice in mercy to be executed in all their judgments; . . . that they will to the utmost of their power maintain the laws of God, the true profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant reformed religion established by law." The same protest in a far different form came forth again at the great crisis at the end of the eighteenth century, when the revolutionary literature of France had set Europe in a blaze, and the idea of the rights of man had shrunk back, and merged in the will of the mob. Against this assertion of this form of self-will again the English nation took resolute ground. They had striven for a law which was above popes and kings, to which these must conform on pain of suppression. They strove for it now against mob law, against popular will openly avowing its own omnipotence, and making the tyrant's claim to do what was right

in its own eyes. And so through our whole history the same thread has run. The nation, often confusedly and with stammering accents, but still on the whole consistently, has borne the same witness as the Church, that as God is living and reigning there must be a law, the expression of His will, at the foundation of all human society, which priests, kings, rulers, people, must discover, acknowledge, obey.

The old question is coming up again for decision all over Europe. With us it is narrowed to a single and simple issue. There are several ways of putting it amongst us, but the result seems to be much the same. Whether by those who offer us as a substitute for God, "a collective humanity into which we are all to be absorbed," or by those who teach that the people is "the collective interpreter of the will of God," the old faith is openly set aside, and we are told that infallibility is at last found for men, and resides in the majority. Such doctrines naturally outrage the historical claimant of infallibility on earth. Looking out at the universal ferment of Christendom, Pius IX. (in his Encyclical Letter of Dec. 8, 1864) denounces those "who dare to publish that the will of the people, manifested by what they call public opinion, or by other means, constitutes the supreme law, independent of all Divine or human law, and that, in political order, events which have been accomplished, by that very reason that they are accomplished, have the force of right." The alternative which the Pope would propose is one which we in England need not discuss;

but we are bound, at our peril, and shall be driven in our time, to consider, whether we are prepared to acknowledge collective humanity, or public opinion, or any other abstraction, as the supreme judge and king of our nation, and of all nations. We may despise the present advocates of social democracy, and a "confederate republic of Europe," and make merry over their sayings and doings at their conventions in Switzerland and elsewhere, but there is no man who knows what is really going on in England but will admit, that there will have to be a serious reckoning with them at no very distant day.

Christians, then, may acknowledge at once that, as a rule, and in the long run, the decision of the people of a country, fairly taken, is likely to be right, and that the will of the people is likely to be more just and patient than that of any person or class. No one can honestly look at the history of our race in the last quarter of a century, to go no further back, and not gladly admit the weight of evidence in favour of this view. There is no great question of principle which has arisen in politics here, in which the great mass of the nation has not been from the first on that which has been at last acknowledged as the right side. In America, to take the one great example, the attitude of the Northern people from first to last, in the great civil war, will make proud the hearts of English-speaking men as long as their language lasts.

The real public opinion of a nation, expressing its deepest convictions (as distinguished from what is ordinarily called public opinion, the first cry of pro-

fessional politicians and journalists, which usually goes wrong), is undoubtedly entitled to very great respect. But, after making all fair allowances, no honest man, however warm a democrat he may be, can shut his eyes to the facts which stare him in the face at home, in our colonies, in the United States, and refuse to acknowledge that the will of the majority in a nation, ascertained by the best processes yet known to us, is not always or altogether just, or consistent, or stable; that the deliberate decisions of the people are not unfrequently tainted by ignorance, or passion, or prejudice.

Are we, then, to rest contented with this ultimate regal power, to resign ourselves to the inevitable, and admit that for us, here at last in this nineteenth century, there is nothing higher or better to look for; and if we are to have a king at all, it must be king people or king mob, according to the mood in which our section of collective humanity happens to be? Surely we are not prepared for this any more than the Pope is. Many of us feel that Tudors, and Stuarts, and Oliver Cromwell, and cliques of Whig or Tory aristocrats, may have been bad enough; but that any tyranny under which England has groaned in the past has been light by the side of what we may come to, if we are to carry out the new political gospel to its logical conclusion, and surrender ourselves to government by the counting of heads, pure and simple.

But if we will not do this, is there any alternative, since we repudiate personal government, but to fall back on the old Hebrew and Christian faith, that the

nations are ruled by a living, present, invisible King, whose will is perfectly righteous and loving, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? It is beside the question to urge that such a faith throws us back on an invisible power, and that we must have visible rulers. Of course we must have visible rulers, even after the advent of the "confederate social republic of Europe." When the whole people is king it must have viceroys like other monarchs. But is public opinion visible? Can we see "collective humanity"? Is it easier for princes or statesmen—for any man or men upon whose shoulders the government rests—to ascertain the will of the people than the will of God? Another consideration meets us at once, and that is, that this belief is assumed in our present practice. Not to insist upon the daily usage in all Christian places of worship and families throughout the land, the Parliament of the country opens its daily sittings with the most direct confession of this faith which words can express, and prays—addressing God, and not public opinion, or collective humanity—"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Surely it were better to get rid of this solemn usage as a piece of cant, which must demoralize the representatives of the nation, if we mean nothing particular by it, and either recast our form of prayer, substituting "the people," or what else we please, for "God," or let the whole business alone, as one which is past man's understanding. If we really believe that a nation has no means of finding out God's will, it is hypocritical and cowardly to go on praying that it may be done.

That will may be unjust, unloving, variable, for anything we know; and as honest men and citizens we cannot wish, or ask, that our country may be ruled by it.

But it will be said, assuming all that is asked, what practical difference can it possibly make in the government of nations? Admit as pointedly as you can, by profession and by worship, and honestly believe, that a Divine will is ruling in the world, and in each nation, what will it effect? Will it alter the course of events one iota, or the acts of any government or governor? Would not a Neapolitan Bourbon be just as ready to make it his watchword as an English Alfred? Might not a committee of public safety placard the scaffold with a declaration of this faith? It is a contention for a shadow.

Is it so? Does not every man recognise in his own life, and in his observation of the world around him, the enormous and radical difference between the two principles of action, and the results which they bring about? What man do we reckon worthy of honour, and delight to obey and follow—him who asks when he has to act, what will A, B, and C say to this? or him who asks, is this right, true, just, in harmony with the will of God? Don't we despise ourselves when we give way to the former tendency, or, in other words, when we admit the sovereignty of public opinion? Don't we feel that we are in the right and manly path when we follow the latter? And if this be true of private men, it must hold in the case of those who are in authority.

Those rulers, whatever name they may go by, who turn to what constituents, leagues, the press are saying or doing, to guide them as to the course they are to follow, in the faith that the will of the majority is the ultimate and only possible arbiter, will never deliver or strengthen a nation however skilful they may be in occupying its best places.

All the signs of our time tell us that the day of earthly kings has gone by, and the advent to power of the great body of the people, those who live by manual labour, is at hand. Already a considerable percentage of them are as intelligent and provident as the classes above them, and as capable of conducting affairs, and administering large interests successfully. In England, the co-operative movement, and the organization of the trade societies, should be enough to prove this, to any one who has eyes, and is open to conviction. In another generation that number will have increased tenfold, and the sovereignty of the country will virtually pass into their hands. Upon their patriotism and good sense the fortunes of the kingdom, of which Alfred laid the deep foundations a thousand years ago, will depend as directly and absolutely as they have ever depended on the will of earthly king or statesman. It is vain to blink the fact that democracy is upon us, that "new order of society which is to be founded by labour for labour," and the only thing for wise men to do is to look it in the face, and see how the short intervening years may be used to the best advantage. Happily for us, the task has been already

begun in earnest. Our soundest and wisest political thinkers are all engaged upon the great and inevitable change, whether they dread, or exult in, the prospect. Thus far, too, they all agree, that the great danger of the future lies in that very readiness of the people to act in great masses, and to get rid of personal and individual responsibility, which is the characteristic of the organizations by which they have gained, and secured, their present position. Nor is there any difference as to how this danger is to be met. Our first aim must be to develop to the utmost the sense of personal and individual responsibility.

But how is this to be done? To whom are men wielding great powers to be taught that they are responsible? If they can learn that there is still a King ruling in England through them, whom if they will fear they need fear no other power in earth or heaven, whom if they can love and trust they will want no other guide or helper, all will be well, and we may look for a reign of justice in England such as she has never seen yet, whatever form our government may take. But, in any case, those who hold the old faith will still be sure, that the order of God's kingdom will not change. If the kings of the earth are passing away, because they have never acknowledged the order which was established for them, the conditions on which they were set in high places, those who succeed them will have to come under the same order, and the same conditions. When the great body of those who have done the hard work of the world, and got little enough of its wages hitherto

—the real stuff of which every nation is composed—have entered on their inheritance, they may sweep away many things, and make short work with thrones and kings. But there is one throne which they cannot pull down—the throne of righteousness, which is over all the nations; and one King whose rule they cannot throw off—the Son of God, and Son of Man, who will judge them as He has judged all kings and all governments before them.

THE END.

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